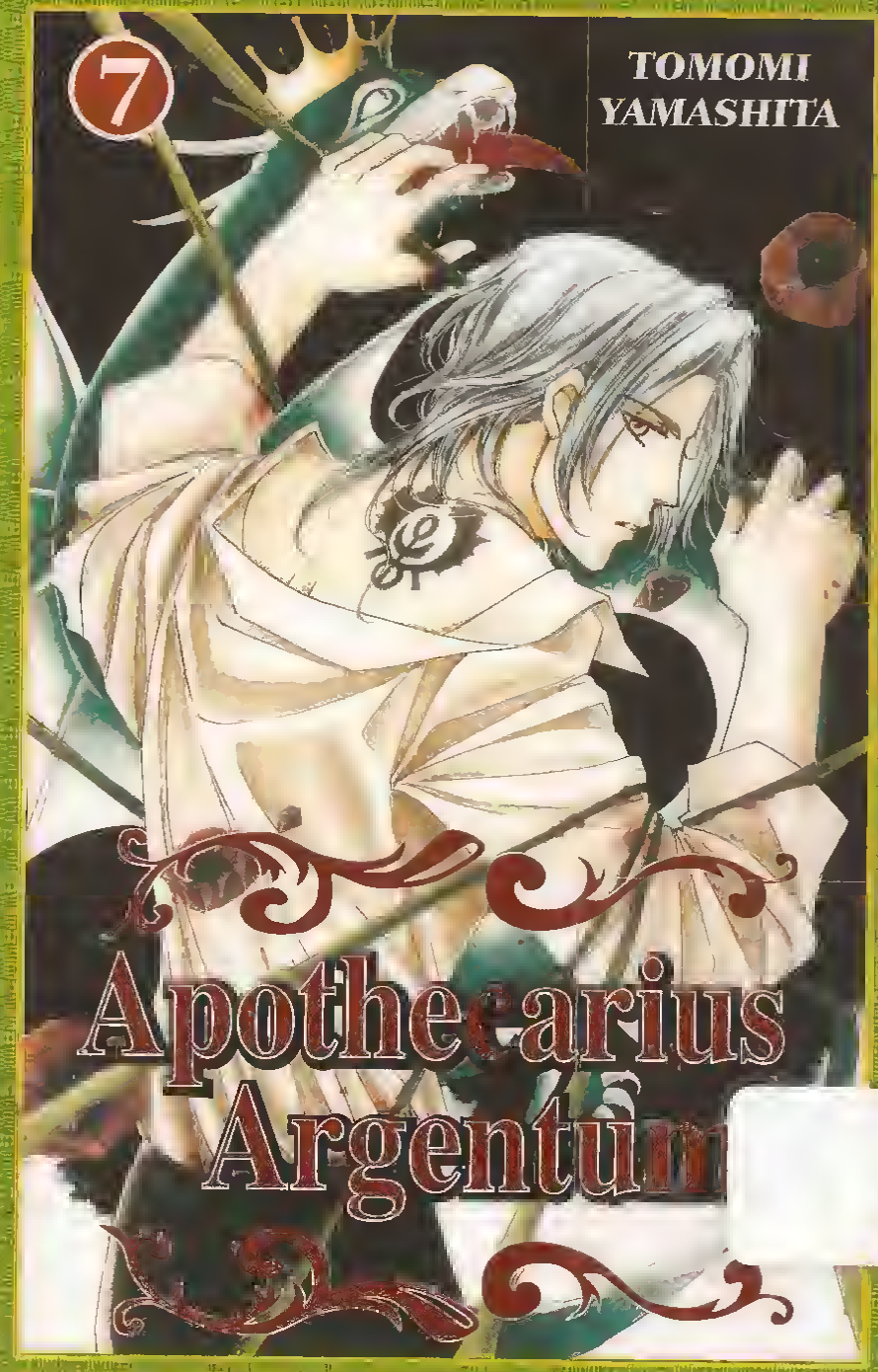

7
TOMOMI YAMASHITA
Apothecarius Argentum

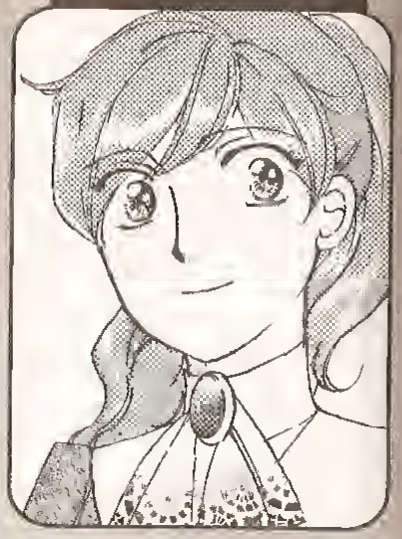
Apothecarius Argentum

Volume 7

By Tomomi Yamashita

Lorca
The Prince of Navarra, a neighboring kingdom. He wants to marry Lady Primula.

Lady Primula
The daughter of The King of Beazol. A strong-minded woman, she's known as the "Princess of Steel."



The King of Beazol
He's known as a ruthless monarch but he loves his daughter dearly

Carli
Lady Primula's etiquette instructor

Argent was fed poison during his youth, and because of his ability to both absorb and expel toxins, he became the ultimate assassin. The King of Beazol bought Argent to be the food taster for his young daughter. However, the Princess freed Argent and instructed him to flee from the palace.

Several years later, Argent reappeared as a skilled healer and saved the Princess from an assassination attempt. As a result, he was promoted to the position of Royal Apothecary. Along with Soda, his apprentice, Argent now works tirelessly for the people of Beazol.

Argent discovered there may be a way to detoxify his body in Castoria, which would allow him to lead a normal life. He set out to Castoria with Soda. There, he met Lulu, a female doctor. He is now serving as her apprentice without charge for three months to gain this information. However, Lulu has a secret that she's been hiding from Argent.

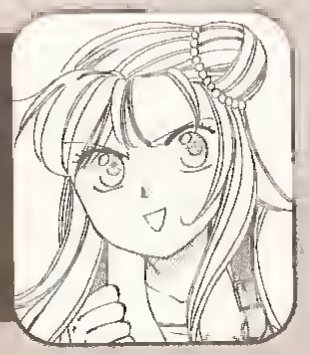
Apothecarius Argentum

Character Introductions
and Summary of Previous Volume

Soda
Argent's assistant and pupil.

Argent
The royal apothecary and Lady Primula's former food taster

Popola
Daughter of a former diamond mine owner.



Nola
A prostitute working in Castoria.

Lulu
A Castorian doctor.

Recipe 25 • Lulu's Secret

Apothecarius Argentum

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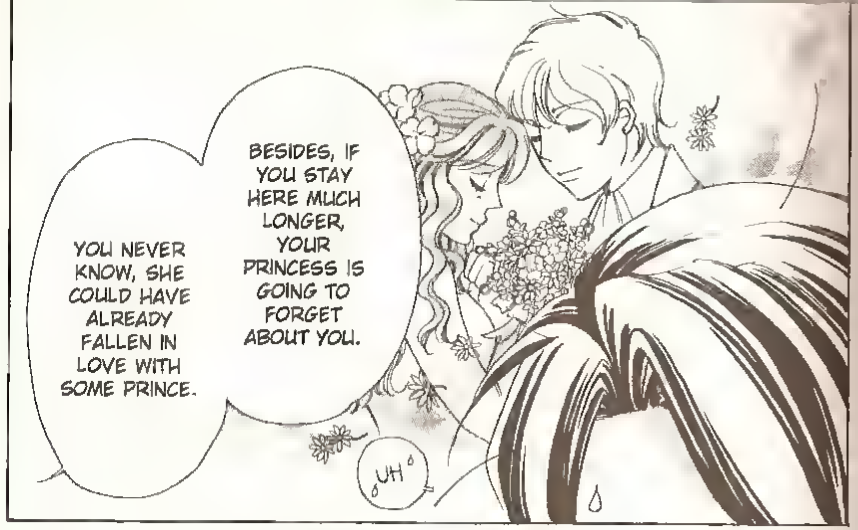
Dear Lady Primula,
I'm not sure if you received my previous letter, but I will proceed to continue with my report.
I finally entered Castoria to find the stone to detoxify my body
I've been working under Dr. Lulu for several months now.
I've been learning new and fascinating things every day
THE ANESTHETIC YOU USED TODAY WAS DIFFERENT.
THE GAS YOU INHALED PRIOR TO THE EXTRACTION WAS AN ANESTHETIC.
N...NO, HOW DID YOU DO THAT?
AN ADULT MAN CRYING ABOUT TOOTH EXTRACTION. DID THAT HURT? HUH?

LET'S BEGIN.
B--BUT...
IT'S JUST GONNA GET WORSE.
I THINK I'VE CHANGED MY MIND FOR NOW.
UH...
WAAAAH! THEY'RE GONNA KILL ME!!
YES MA'AM !!!
ARGENT, SODA! HOLD HIM DOWN!
WE'LL USE THAT, THEN.

I WAS RIGHT! HE WAS THE EMPEROR OF THE NIGHT. HIS BUSINESS WAS ONLY OPEN FOR A DAY, THOUGH!
SO THAT'S THE NEW APPRENTICE?
I NEVER KNEW HE WAS WORKING WITH LULU!
YAK YAK
WHAT'S WITH THE SUDDEN SURGE OF ONLOOKERS
SURE...
HERE'S ANALGESIC AND AN ANTIBIOTIC.
I'M ABOUT READY TO PASS OUT.
WOW, POPOLA! THAT LOOKS DELICIOUS!
EVERYONE WORKED SO HARD! TONIGHT'S DINNER IS CHICKEN, COURTESY OF MR. GALT!

WAIT, I WAS A GUINEA PIG?
I SEE.
IT'S NOT AS STRONG AS THE PREVIOUS ANESTHETIC, BUT I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE GOOD FOR SOMETHING SIMPLE LIKE A TOOTH EXTRACTION.
IT WAS FORMERLY USED FOR LAMPS DURING MINING, BUT SOME WOULD DELIBERATELY INHALE THE FUMES TO BECOME INTOXICATED. THAT WAS MY HINT.
RIGHT, YOU GET GAS WHEN YOU MIX METAL OR MINERALS WITH NITRIC ACID.
IF IT DOESN'T HURT, MAYBE I'LL ASK FOR AN EXTRACTION TOO.
THAT WAS JUST A TOOTH EXTRACTION?
WITH ALL THAT SCREAMING, I THOUGHT IT WAS MORE SERIOUS...
LET'S CUT THE DISCUSSION SHORT AND GET ON WITH MEDICATION.
WE'VE GOT PEOPLE WAITING.
I DID LOSE A LEG, BUT OTHERWISE, I'M IN GREAT SHAPE.
GALT! YOU'RE ALL RIGHT!!
TODAY, I'M HERE TO GET HELP WITH MY ARTIFICIAL LEG.
AFTER ALL, SHE SAVED MY LIFE.
I RECOMMEND LULU AS A DOCTOR. SHE'S A SKILLED PRACTITIONER!


BESIDES, IF YOU STAY HERE MUCH LONGER, YOUR PRINCESS IS GOING TO FORGET ABOUT YOU.
YOU NEVER KNOW, SHE COULD HAVE ALREADY FALLEN IN LOVE WITH SOME PRINCE.
UH

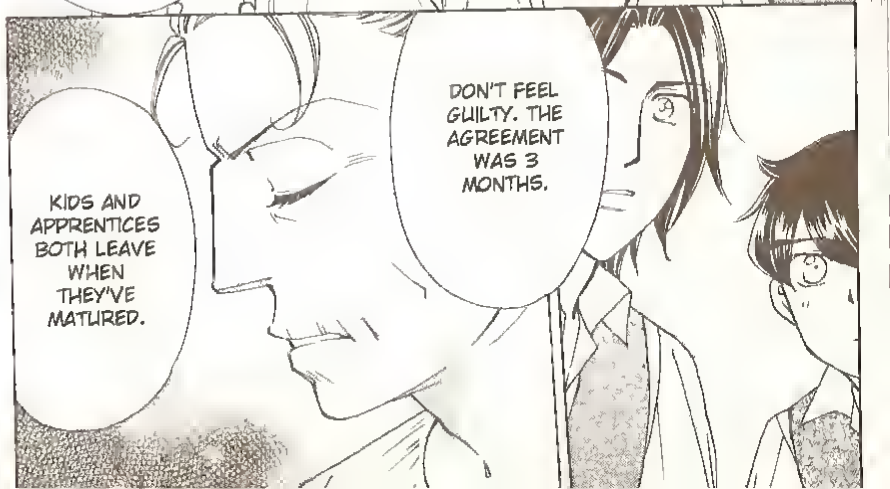
LULU, THAT'S NOT FUNNY...
REALLY? IS THAT SO?
I HEARD SHE WAS A GIANT, AND THAT SHE'S DOING QUITE WELL FOR HERSELF!
MY LADY IS NEITHER A GIANT NOR A BEAR!!

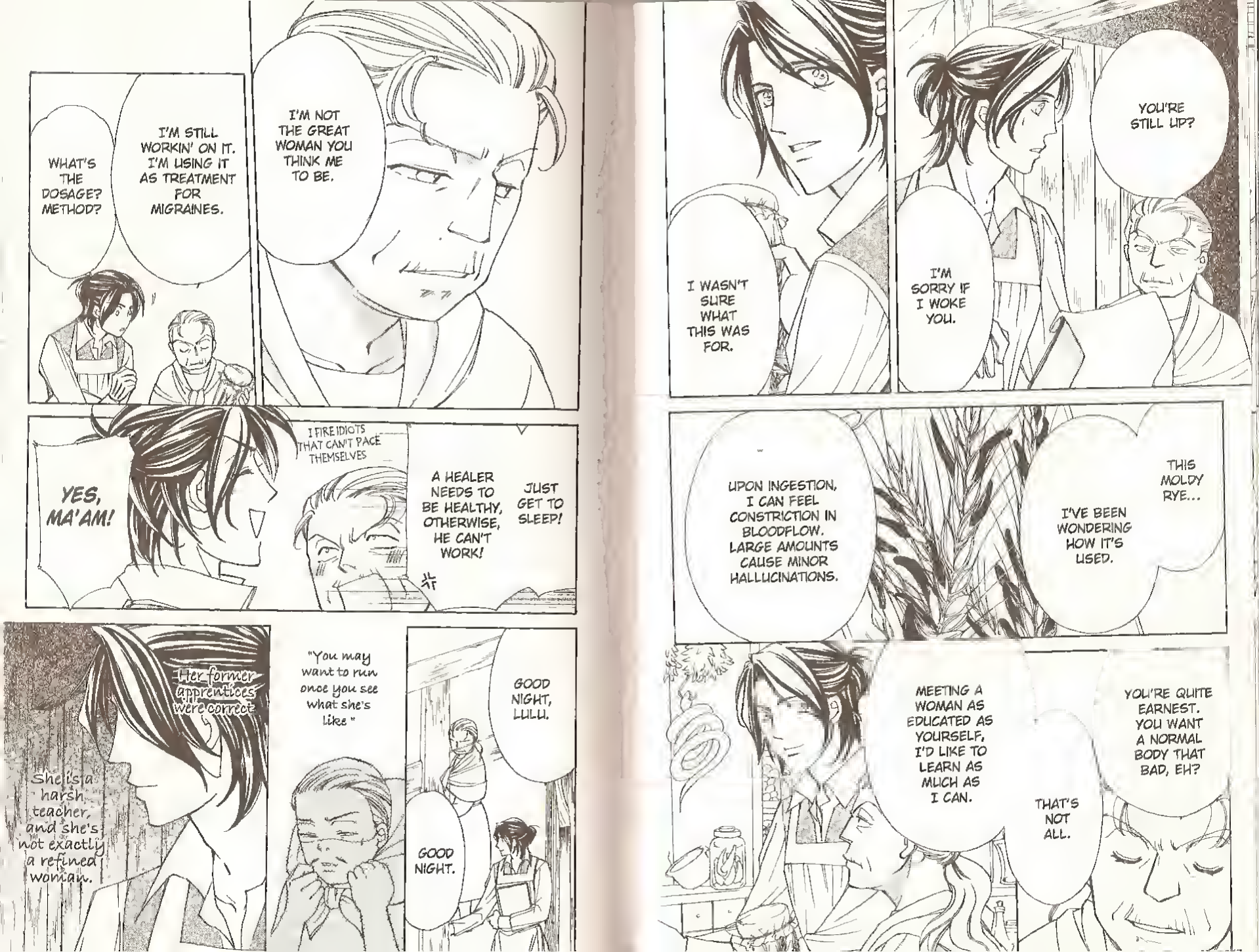
IN THAT CASE, GIVE US DETAILS OF WHAT YOU LIKE ABOUT HER.
.....
DO TELL

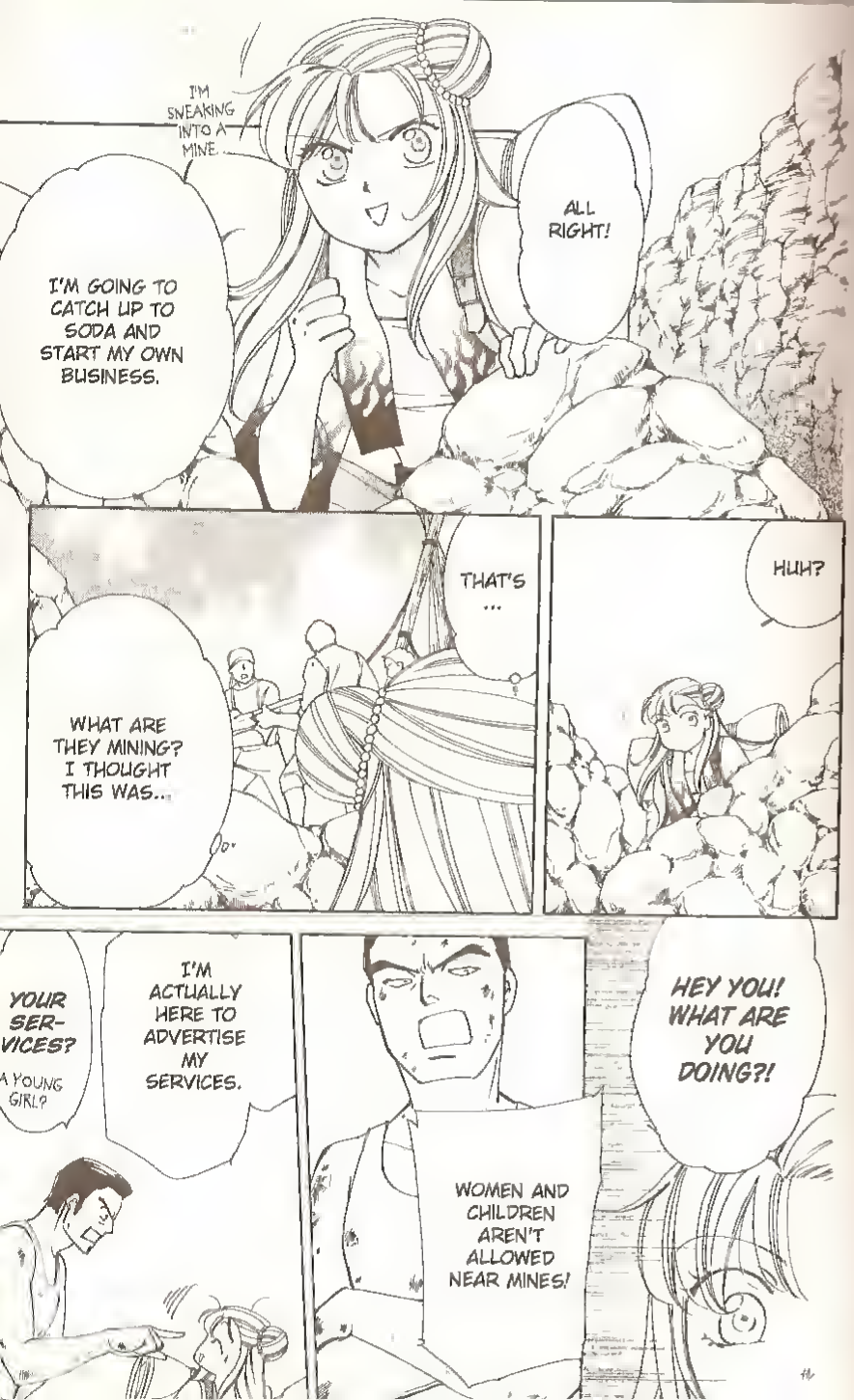
YES. LOTS OF PATIENTS ARE COMING TO SEE YOU, MASTER.
THAT'S NOT TRUE, MANY ARE HERE BECAUSE THEY'VE HEARD ABOUT LULU'S SKILL.

I'VE HAD AN EXCESS OF CLIENTS SINCE YOU GUYS CAME ALONG. NOT SURE IF THAT'S A GOOD THING.

LULU, WE SHOULD WORK OVERTIME AND SPREAD YOUR REPUTATION TO THE PEOPLE!
I DON'T THINK SO.
SO WHAT IF WE GET MORE WORK? YOU TWO ARE LEAVING IN A MONTH.

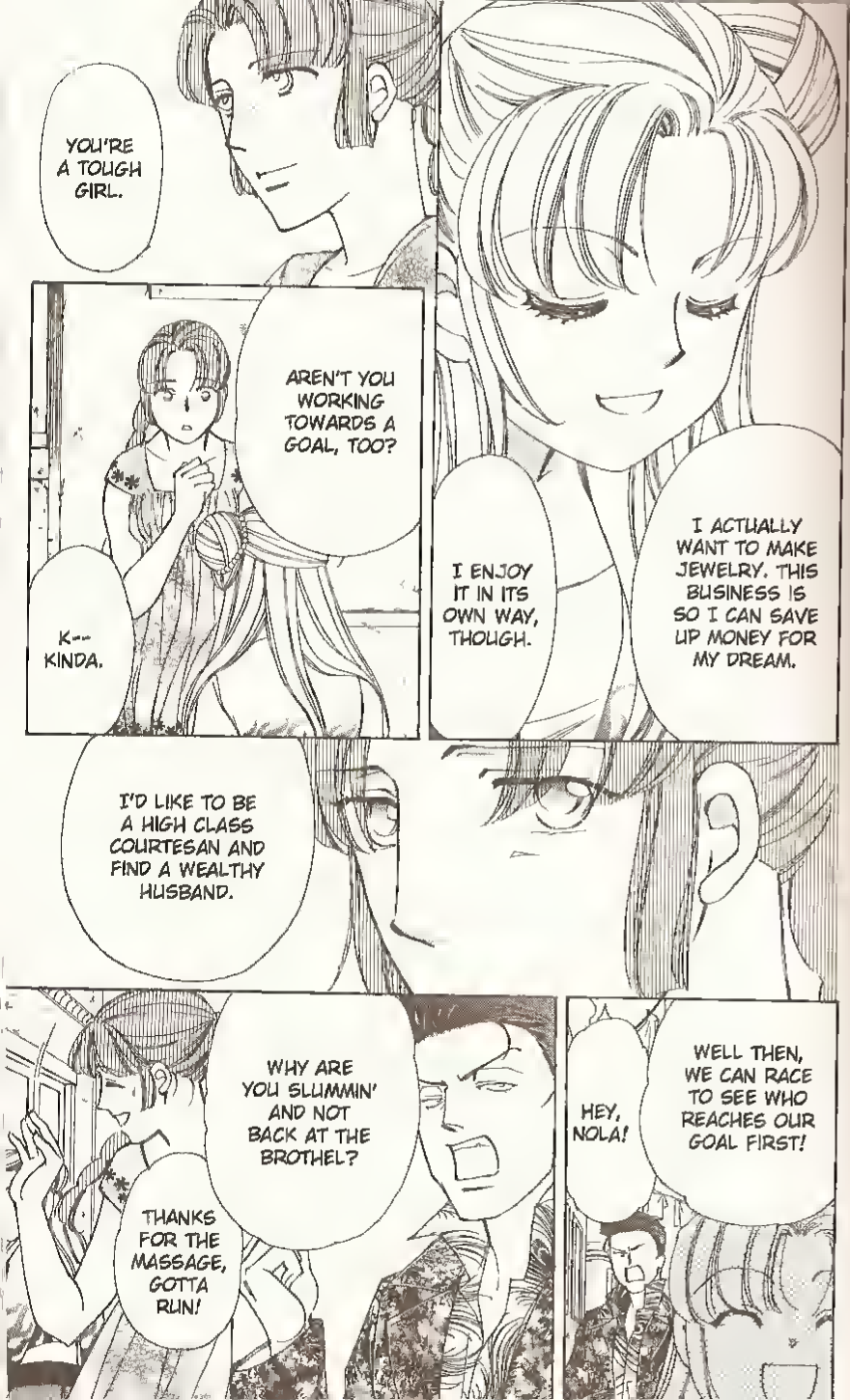

DON'T FEEL GUILTY. THE AGREEMENT WAS 3 MONTHS.
KIDS AND APPRENTICES BOTH LEAVE WHEN THEY'VE MATURED.


I'M NOT THE GREAT WOMAN YOU THINK ME TO BE.
I'M STILL WORKIN' ON IT. I'M USING IT AS TREATMENT FOR MIGRAINES.
WHAT'S THE DOSAGE? METHOD?
I FIRE IDIOTS THAT CAN'T PACE THEMSELVES
A HEALER NEEDS TO BE HEALTHY, OTHERWISE, HE CAN'T WORK!
JUST GET TO SLEEP!
YES, MA'AM!
GOOD NIGHT, LULU.
GOOD NIGHT.
"You may want to run once you see what she's like."
Her former apprentices were correct.
She is a harsh teacher, and she's not exactly a refined woman.
I WASN'T SURE WHAT THIS WAS FOR.
I'M SORRY IF I WOKE YOU.
YOU'RE STILL UP?
UPON INGESTION, I CAN FEEL CONSTRICTION IN BLOODFLOW. LARGE AMOUNTS CAUSE MINOR HALLUCINATIONS.
I'VE BEEN WONDERING HOW IT'S USED.
THIS MOLDY RYE...
MEETING A WOMAN AS EDUCATED AS YOURSELF, I'D LIKE TO LEARN AS MUCH AS I CAN.
THAT'S NOT ALL.
YOU'RE QUITE EARNEST. YOU WANT A NORMAL BODY THAT BAD, EH?


I'M SNEAKING INTO A MINE.
I'M GOING TO CATCH UP TO SODA AND START MY OWN BUSINESS.
ALL RIGHT!
WHAT ARE THEY MINING? I THOUGHT THIS WAS...
THAT'S ...
HUH?
YOUR SER-VICES?
A YOUNG GIRL?
I'M ACTUALLY HERE TO ADVERTISE MY SERVICES.
WOMEN AND CHILDREN AREN'T ALLOWED NEAR MINES!
HEY YOU! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!

I HOPE NOTHING HAPPENS IN THE NEXT MONTH.
AM I BEING MATERNAL, OR...
WHY IS IT THAT I DON'T WANT THEM TO FIND OUT ABOUT THIS?
LULU IS A DOCTOR AMONG DOCTORS ...
WHAT'S GOTTEN INTO ME?

KEEP QUIET, WILLYA?
WE'RE JOKING, NOLA!
I'LL LET MY MISTRESS KNOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO PLAY AROUND WITH AN AMATEUR!
MOUTHY NEWBIE.
WHY ARE THEY MINING LEAD?
THIS USED TO BE A HIGH QUALITY RUBY MINE!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING, JUMPING INTO A CROWD OF ROUGH MEN LIKE THAT!
AT ANOTHER MINE--
OW!
THIS IS A FRIENDLY WARNING. DON'T GET INVOLVED IN CASTORIA'S MINING BUSINESS.
IS THE LEAD EXPORTED ABROAD?
I DIDN'T SEE ANY PRODUCTS INSIDE THE COUNTRY THAT USED LEAD.
WE'LL JUST GET DIRTY AGAIN RIGHT AFTER A SOAK.
HOT SPRINGS?
GET LOST, KID!
BUT ...
UNLESS YOU'RE WILLING TO...
I'M HERE TO EASE THE EXHAUSTION OF HARD WORKING MEN!
I ACTUALLY HAVE A HOT SPRING BUSINESS RIGHT OUTSIDE THE BORDER.
...EASE OUR EXHAUSTION IN OTHER WAYS. KNOW WHAT I MEAN?
YOU JERK! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
LET ME GO!


YOU'RE A TOUGH GIRL.
AREN'T YOU WORKING TOWARDS A GOAL, TOO?
K--KINDA.
I ENJOY IT IN ITS OWN WAY, THOUGH.
I ACTUALLY WANT TO MAKE JEWELRY. THIS BUSINESS IS SO I CAN SAVE UP MONEY FOR MY DREAM.
I'D LIKE TO BE A HIGH CLASS COURTESAN AND FIND A WEALTHY HUSBAND.
WHY ARE YOU SLUMMIN' AND NOT BACK AT THE BROTHEL?
THANKS FOR THE MASSAGE, GOTTA RUN!
HEY, NOLA!
WELL THEN, WE CAN RACE TO SEE WHO REACHES OUR GOAL FIRST!

I GOT MEDICINE FROM HER ALREADY.
I'M FINE.
ARE YOU OKAY? SHOULD I TAKE YOU TO LULU?
HUH?
YOU RESCUED ME!
I'LL GIVE YOU A FOOT MASSAGE!
IT WAS POPULAR, BUT WE WERE INTRUDING ON LULU'S TURF.
THIS WAS THE RUMORED BUSINESS THAT ONLY LASTED A DAY....
SPLASH
THIS IS MY BUSINESS.

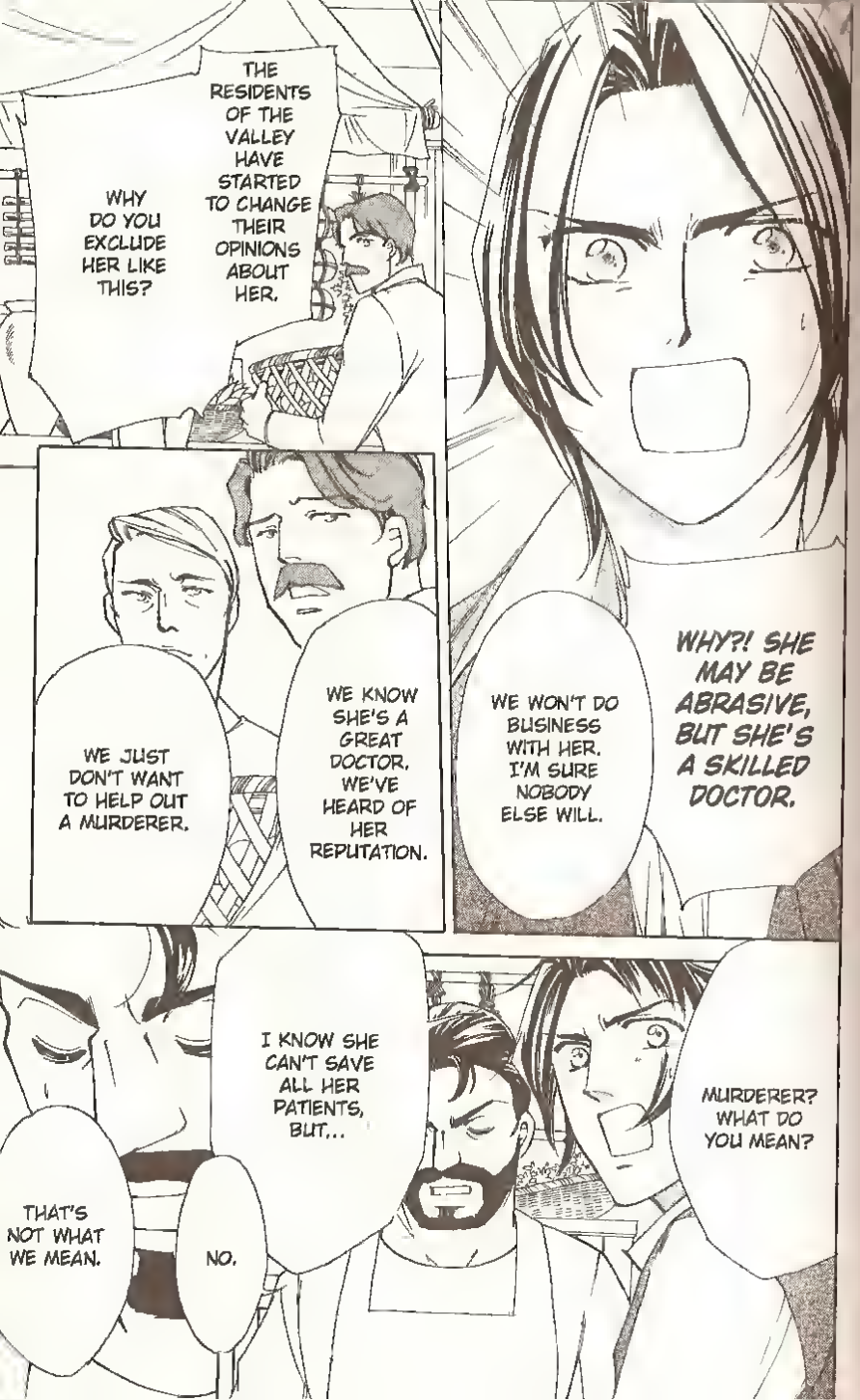
I WAS GOING TO COME A FEW TIMES, BUT KEPT CHANGING MY MIND.
YOU'RE LATE!
AH, YOU'RE FINALLY HERE.
GOOD EVENING, LULU.
THE DRUG DIDN'T WORK, RIGHT?
HERE'S YOUR THING BACK.
I KNOW WHAT YOU NEED TO DO.
YES, AND I...
YOU'RE NOT ILL, SO YOU DON'T NEED MEDICINE. I KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. YOU DO, TOO, DON'T YOU?
OF COURSE IT DIDN'T. THAT WAS JUST STARCH.

I'M SORRY ...
WHERE DID I GO WRONG?
YOU NEED TO PAY BACK WHAT YOU OWE ME.
THIS IS THE ONLY WORK THAT YOU CAN DO.
I HEAR YOU DIDN'T TAKE ANY CUSTOMERS TODAY. WHAT'S GOIN' ON?
I'M SORRY, BOSS.
"I'VE HELPED DOZENS OF GIRLS LIKE YOU. JUST LET ME HANDLE IT."
"I CAN GET YOU IN FOR SURE. I CAN HELP YOU."
"YOU COULDN'T ENTER THE COUNTRY?"
"YEAH, UNFORTUNATELY. I DON'T HAVE ANY SPECIAL SKILLS."
MY LIFE WAS NOT SUPPOSED TO TURN OUT LIKE THIS...

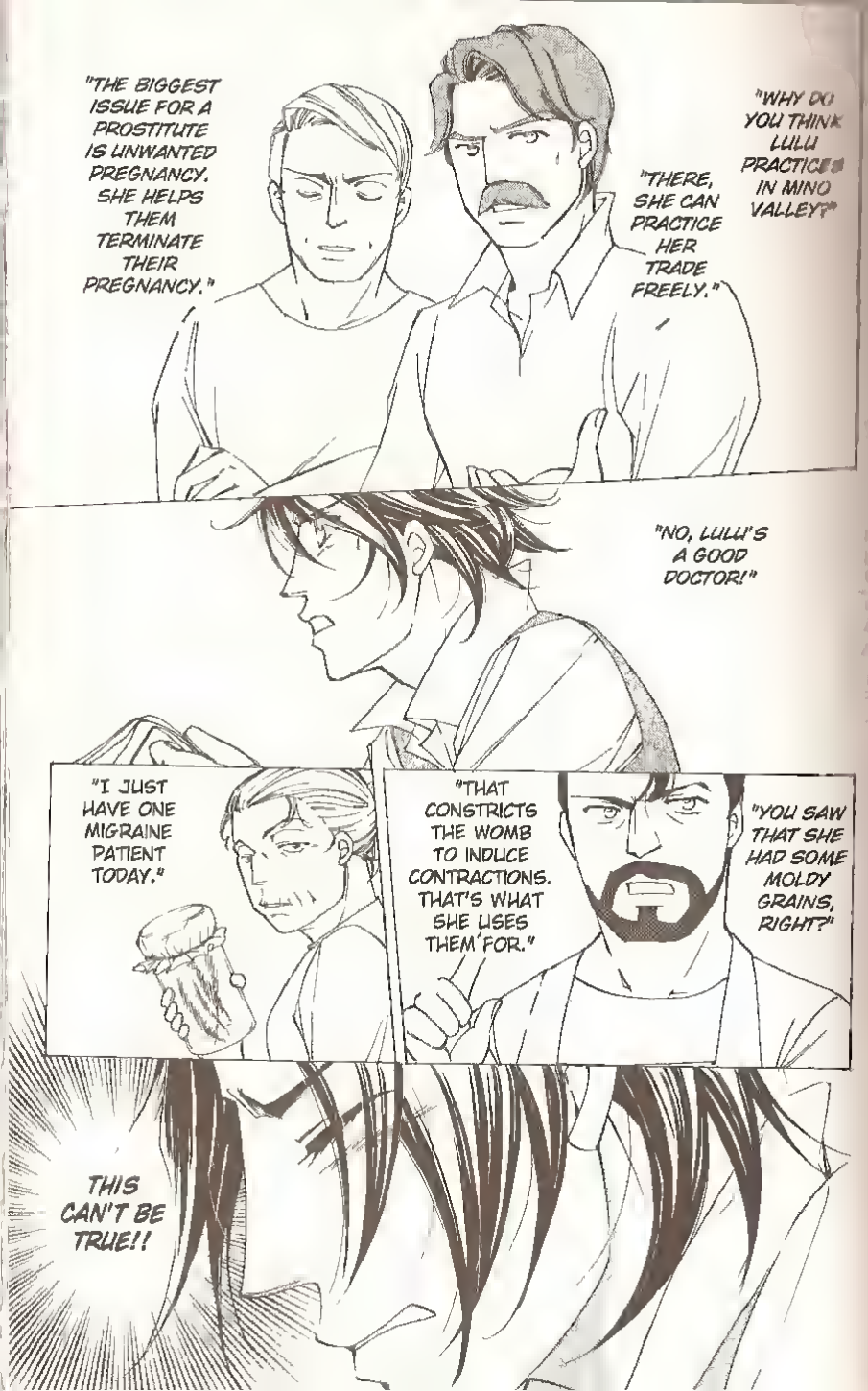
I JUST HAVE ONE MIGRAINE PATIENT TODAY.
WHAT ABOUT THE PATIENTS?
WHAT?
THUD
TAKE A HINT, KID.
I'D LOVE TO SEE THE TREATMENT!
HERE, I'LL EVEN GIVE YOU AN ALLOWANCE. NOW, SCRAM!
JANGLE
MASTER, LET'S HIT THE TOWN AND PARTY!
WOW, THIS MUCH? YAY!
I'D LIKE TO HAVE A DAY FREE OF CONSTANT QUESTIONS.
I NEED A BREAK MYSELF.

I'LL HELP YOU.
I CAN'T DO THIS TODAY, BUT COME BACK TOMORROW.
YOU GET A DAY OFF TODAY. GO BLOW OFF STEAM IN THE CITY.
ARGENT, SODA AND POPOLA ...

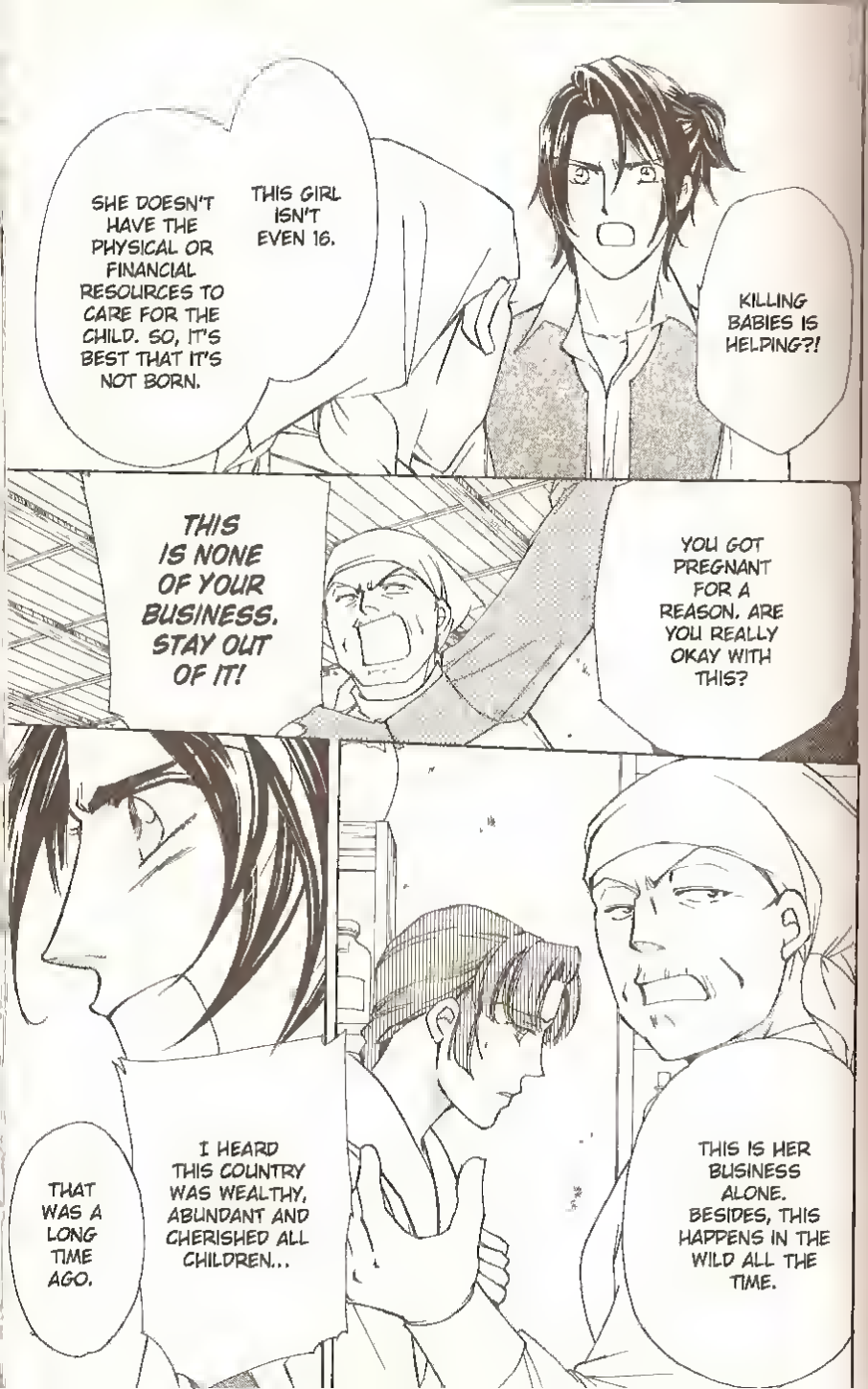
WHA—?
IF YOU'RE GONNA BUY SOMETHING, GET A GIFT FOR LADY PRIMULA!
TO BUY SUPPLIES FOR THE TREATMENT ROOM.
MASTER, WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS.
JUST TAKE IT! ♪
HERE YOU GO, POPOLA.
HE'S DEFINITELY MORE MATURE.
LOVE ISN'T JUST ABOUT RANDOM SPENDING.
I HAVE THE DIAMOND RING FROM POPOLA AS A GIFT FOR HER. BESIDES, SHE WOULD APPROVE OF CONSTRUCTIVE SPENDING.
I GOT RID OF 'EM. COME IN FROM THE BACK.
DASH DASH DASH
POPOLA, LET'S GO TO THE CITY! LET'S LIGHTEN UP AND ENJOY! ♡
WOO HOO! ♥
DON'T WASTE THE ALLOWANCE.
THANKS LULU. WE'LL BE LEAVING, THEN.
I'LL PREPARE RIGHT AWAY.
NO, GIMME *TWO* OF THOSE SKEWERS!
MISTER, GIMME ONE...
AFTER ALL, LULU TOOK OFF WITH OUR WARES AND MONEY.
WE'VE NEVER REALLY HAD THE CHANCE TO LOOK AROUND CASTORIA.

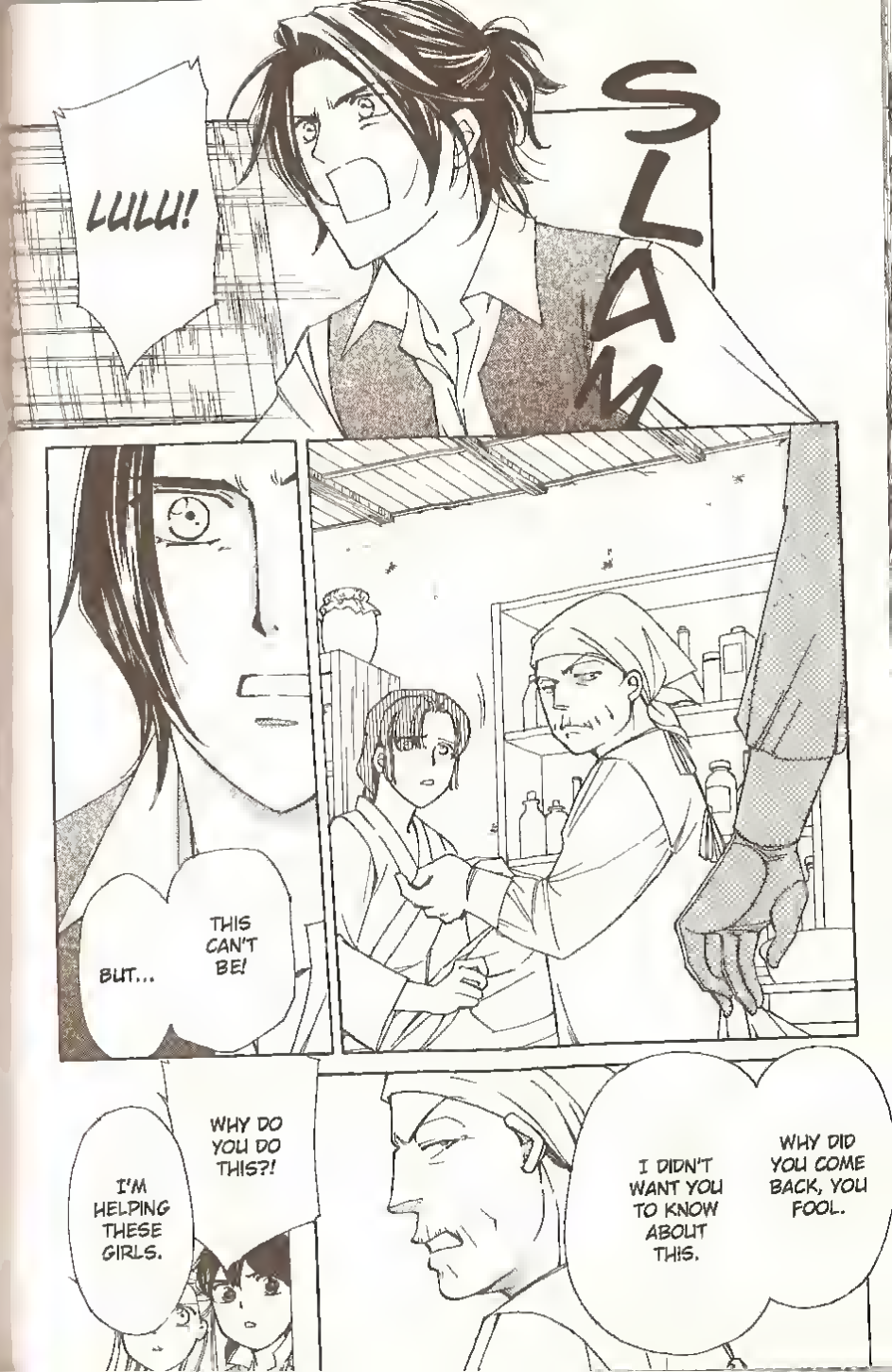

WHY DO YOU EXCLUDE HER LIKE THIS?
THE RESIDENTS OF THE VALLEY HAVE STARTED TO CHANGE THEIR OPINIONS ABOUT HER.
WHY?! SHE MAY BE ABRASIVE, BUT SHE'S A SKILLED DOCTOR.
WE WON'T DO BUSINESS WITH HER. I'M SURE NOBODY ELSE WILL.
WE KNOW SHE'S A GREAT DOCTOR. WE'VE HEARD OF HER REPUTATION.
WE JUST DON'T WANT TO HELP OUT A MURDERER.
MURDERER? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I KNOW SHE CAN'T SAVE ALL HER PATIENTS, BUT...
NO.
THAT'S NOT WHAT WE MEAN.

CAN I HAVE 30 PIECES OF THAT WHITE CLOTH AND SOME SUPPLIES FOR MEDICINE?
I'LL TAKE A BAG EACH OF THE OYSTERS, HAWTHORNE, AND BARK.
ARE YOU LULU'S NEW ASSISTANT IN MINO VALLEY THAT EVERYONE'S BEEN TALKING ABOUT?
I HAVEN'T SEEN YOUR MUG BEFORE, BUT YOU SEEM KNOWL-EDGEABLE.
I'M AN APOTH-ECARY.
YES, I AM.
SORRY, WE CAN'T SELL SUPPLIES TO LULU.
BEAT IT!


"THE BIGGEST ISSUE FOR A PROSTITUTE IS UNWANTED PREGNANCY. SHE HELPS THEM TERMINATE THEIR PREGNANCY."
"THERE, SHE CAN PRACTICE HER TRADE FREELY."
"WHY DO YOU THINK LULU PRACTICES IN MINO VALLEY?"
"NO, LULU'S A GOOD DOCTOR!"
"I JUST HAVE ONE MIGRAINE PATIENT TODAY."
"THAT CONSTRICTS THE WOMB TO INDUCE CONTRACTIONS. THAT'S WHAT SHE USES THEM FOR."
"YOU SAW THAT SHE HAD SOME MOLDY GRAINS, RIGHT?"
THIS CAN'T BE TRUE!!

MASTER! DID YOU GET THE SUPPLIES?
MASTER?
WE HAVE TO GO BACK RIGHT AWAY.
WHAT? COME ON!
WE JUST GOT HERE!
COME ON, HURRY UP BEFORE HE LEAVES US BEHIND.
YOU DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER OTHER TRADE?
WHINNY


SHE DOESN'T HAVE THE PHYSICAL OR FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO CARE FOR THE CHILD. SO, IT'S BEST THAT IT'S NOT BORN.
THIS GIRL ISN'T EVEN 16.
KILLING BABIES IS HELPING?!
THIS IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS. STAY OUT OF IT!
YOU GOT PREGNANT FOR A REASON. ARE YOU REALLY OKAY WITH THIS?
THAT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.
I HEARD THIS COUNTRY WAS WEALTHY, ABUNDANT AND CHERISHED ALL CHILDREN...
THIS IS HER BUSINESS ALONE. BESIDES, THIS HAPPENS IN THE WILD ALL THE TIME.


LULU!
SLAM
BUT...
THIS CAN'T BE!
I'M HELPING THESE GIRLS.
WHY DO YOU DO THIS?!
I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT THIS.
WHY DID YOU COME BACK, YOU FOOL.

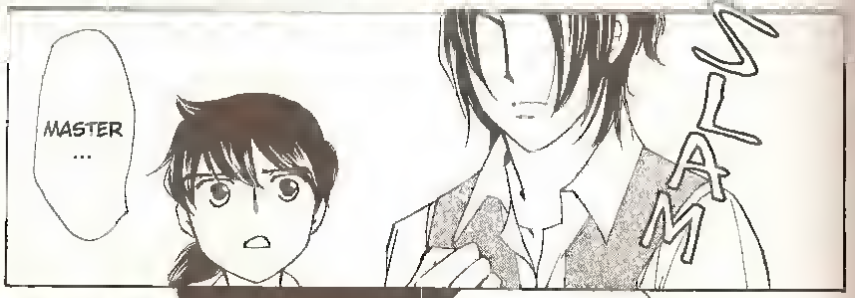
DO YOU KNOW HOW AMATEURS TERMINATE PREGNANCIES?
I THOUGHT A DOCTOR'S ROLE WAS TO SAVE LIVES, REGARDLESS OF THE SITUATION.
I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU BUSYBODIES.
THAT CAN CAUSE PERMANENT INFERTILITY AND COULD KILL THE WOMAN HERSELF.
THAT'S THE LESS PAINFUL WAY. SOME REPEATEDLY KICK THE PREGNANT WOMAN'S WOMB UNTIL SHE MISCARRIES.
THEY DRINK POWERFUL POISONS AND LAXATIVES TO CAUSE A MISCARRIAGE.
YOU SURVIVED, BUT YOU CAN'T TOUCH OR GET CLOSE TO OTHERS.
YOU WERE ABANDONED AT BIRTH, FED POISON, USED BY PEOPLE.
PEOPLE GIVE BIRTH AND KILL OR ABANDON THEIR BABY. YOU'RE A BASILISK. YOU SHOULD KNOW.

PROSTITUTES WORK HARD TO MAKE A KILLING, PEOPLE SAY.
CHILDREN WERE CHERISHED FOR THE LABOR THEY PROVIDED. NOT ANYMORE.
PEOPLE WANT TO MAKE MORE MONEY, BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO SPREAD THEIR WEALTH AMONG A LOT OF KIDS. PEOPLE JUST DON'T WANT AS MANY.
IN REALITY, THEY HAVE TO MAKE SACRIFICES TO EARN MORE MONEY.
THIS IS THE REALITY OF CASTORIA TODAY.
THEY MAY BECOME FANCIER ON THE OUTSIDE, BUT THEIR HEART HARDENS ON THE INSIDE.
UM, I...
I'M GOING HOME.
NOLA!
DASH

I'LL SHOW YOU HOW HOPELESS THINGS CAN BE.
HOPE, EH.
PEOPLE JUST NEED HOPE TO OVERCOME THEIR CHALLENGES!
YET, I PERSE-VERED.
THUD
THIS...
THIS IS THE STONE THAT WILL DETOXIFY A BASILISK.
IT'S A BIT EARLY, BUT HERE YOU GO.
WHAT IS THIS?

SLAM
AFTER ALL THAT HARDSHIP, YOU'RE GONNA TRY TO TELL ME THAT LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL?
THIS IS BETTER THAN A MOTHER REGRETTING THE BIRTH AND A CHILD REGRETTING BEING BORN.
I CHOOSE TO DO THIS!
EARLIER IS BETTER FOR ALL PARTIES INVOLVED.
"I DON'T WANT THIS LIFE IF IT MEANS I COULD DIE AS A HUMAN BEING."
"CLARIS, KILL ME NOW."
RIGHT.
I'VE WANTED TO DIE. IF I SAID I DIDN'T, I'D BE A LIAR.

THAT, I DON'T KNOW.
NOW THAT YOU KNOW, GIVE UP AND GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY!
AND THAT WAS THE REASON FOR BASILISKS BEING HUNTED...?


MASTER ...

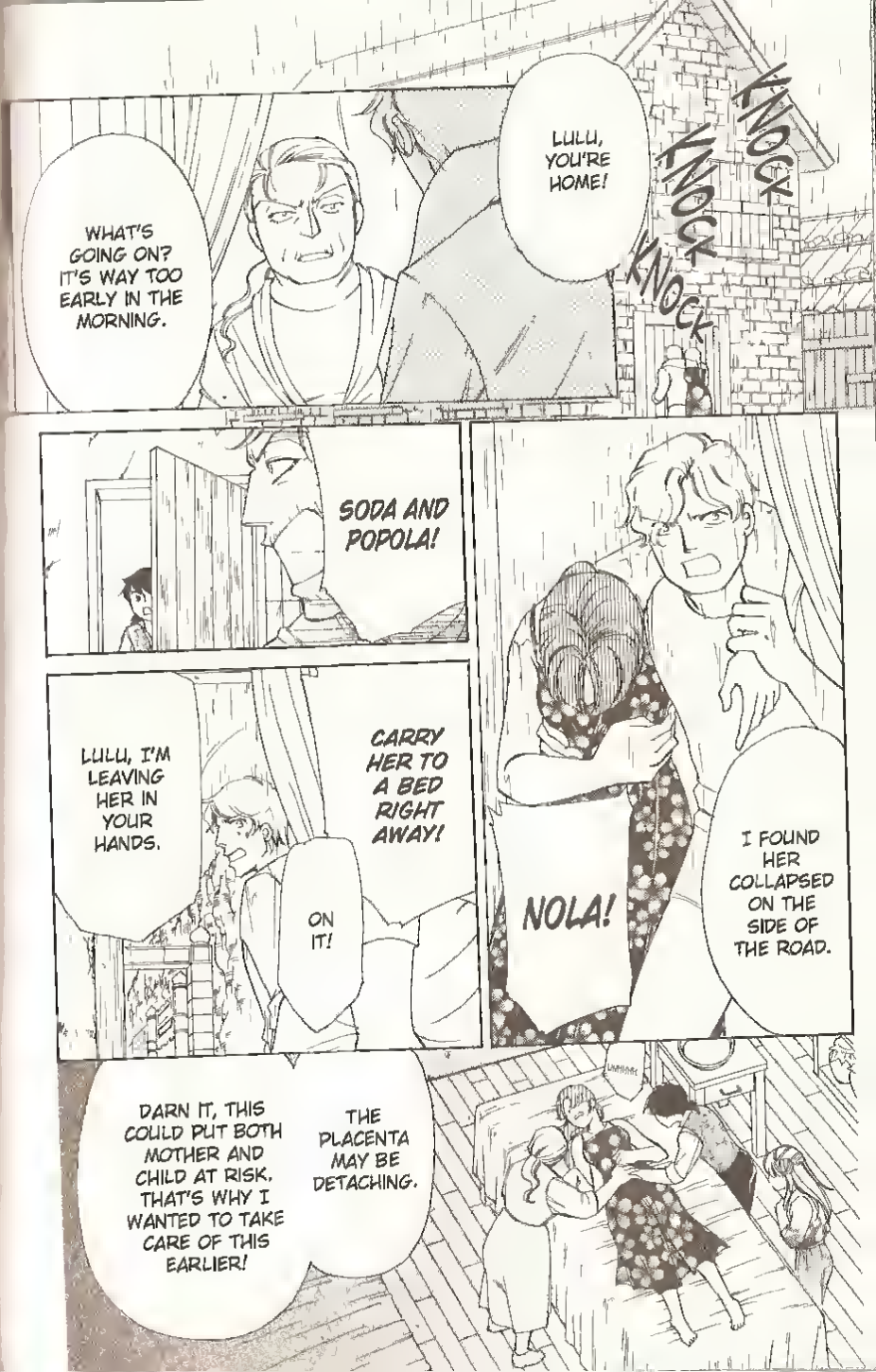
SOMETIMES, THE "HARDEST STONES ARE EASILY BROKEN." LET'S GIVE HIM SOME SPACE.

RUMBLE

THIS IS DIAMOND ORE...
SO, THE RUMOR YOU HEARD ABOUT THAT INCIDENT SPREAD, I'M SURE.
UNFORTUNATELY, IT DIDN'T LEAD TO A COMPLETE DETOXIFICATION. THEY WERE FOUND OUT AND EXECUTED.
BASILISKS WOULD DO IT FOR THE SAME PURPOSE TOO. BUT THEY ALSO REALIZED IT HAS SOME DETOXIFYING EFFECTS, AND THEY STARTED TO EMBED ORES ALL OVER THEIR BODY.
AMONG MINERS, SOME WOULD EMBED DIAMOND ORES INTO THEIR FLESH IN ORDER TO SELL THEM.

WHAT SHOULD I TELL LADY PRIMULA?
WHAT DO I HAVE LEFT...?
I TRAVELLED FAR WITH ONLY HOPE IN MY HEART TO SUSTAIN ME.
I LEFT SO MANY PRECIOUS THINGS BEHIND...
THIS SEARCH ENDED QUICKLY ENOUGH...
I WASN'T EXPECTING TO FIND A SOLUTION. NO, THAT'S A LIE.

COULD YOU AT LEAST SAVE THE BABY, LULU?
I'M NOT FROM A POOR COUNTRY. IT'S JUST BORING. I'M FROM THE COUNTRYSIDE, VERY LITTLE EXCITEMENT THERE.
I AGREE. I WAS GREEDY.
I HEARD GLORIOUS STORIES ABOUT CASTORIA AND COMING HERE BECAME MY DREAM. I THOUGHT MAYBE HERE, I COULD MAKE SOMETHING OF MYSELF...
ONCE I WAS HERE, I COULDN'T ENTER BECAUSE I HAD NO SPECIAL SKILLS.
I THOUGHT WORKING IN A BROTHEL WOULD MEAN EASY MONEY, AND I COULD QUICKLY PAY OFF MY DEBTS. INSTEAD, MY DEBTS KEPT GETTING DEEPER.
WHEN I FOUND OUT I WAS PREGNANT, I WAS WORRIED, BUT A BIT HAPPY.
IT FELT LIKE THE BABY WAS BECOMING MORE OF A TREASURE EVERY DAY.
SO?


KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK
LULU, YOU'RE HOME!
WHAT'S GOING ON? IT'S WAY TOO EARLY IN THE MORNING.
SODA AND POPOLA!
I FOUND HER COLLAPSED ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD.
NOLA!
CARRY HER TO A BED RIGHT AWAY!
LULU, I'M LEAVING HER IN YOUR HANDS.
ON IT!
THE PLACENTA MAY BE DETACHING.
DARN IT, THIS COULD PUT BOTH MOTHER AND CHILD AT RISK. THAT'S WHY I WANTED TO TAKE CARE OF THIS EARLIER!

I PROMISE!
YOU PROMISE NOT TO ABANDON THE BABY AND CARRY THROUGH WITH YOUR DECISION?
I WANT TO...
NOPE, YOU CAN SURVIVE. I'M LIVING PROOF.
THAT'S HOW PEOPLE TRY TO SAVE THE BABY WHEN THE MOTHER DIES! SHE'S GONNA DIE!
LULU, THAT'S RECKLESS!
BUT MASTER ...
DRAG HIM HERE, EVEN IF HE'S KICKING AND SCREAMING. NOW!
I GAVE BIRTH BY THE SAME METHOD IN THE PAST. IT WAS A BAD SITUATION, SO THE BABY DID NOT SURVIVE. THIS TIME, WE HAVE A SKILLED APOTHECARY.

THAT'S... THAT'S TRUE.
YOU'RE BEING IDEALISTIC.
IF I SAVE YOUR BABY, WHO'S GOING TO RAISE THE KID?
IF YOU'RE WILLING TO CARRY OUT YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES, I CAN TRY AND SAVE YOU BOTH.
LULU!
I'M GOING TO OPEN UP YOUR TORSO AND EXTRACT THE BABY THAT WAY.
I'LL HAVE TO CUT INTO YOU.
REALLY? I'LL DO ANYTHING!

YOU WERE BORN ON THIS GODFORSAKEN PLANET FOR A PURPOSE. NOW MAKE YOURSELF USEFUL.
WE DON'T HAVE TIME TO ARGUE. BUCK UP AND GET BUSY.
THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM GALT'S SITUATION IN TERMS OF CONSTITUTION AND PHYSICAL SIZE. WATCH HER BREATHING AND ADJUST THE DOSE AS NEEDED.
IF YOU GIVE TOO MUCH, SHE'LL NEVER WAKE UP. THE SUCCESS OF THIS SURGERY DEPENDS ON YOUR SKILL.

YOU'RE GOING TO CUT INTO HER?
WE CAN'T. WHAT IF SOMETHING HAPPENS DURING SURGERY?
I DON'T HAVE THE CONFIDENCE RIGHT NOW...
YOUR DESIRE TO HELP WAS PRETTY DAMN SHALLOW AND SELF-SERVING, EH?
SO YOU'RE SICK OF SAVING PEOPLE ALL OF A SUDDEN NOW THAT YOU CAN'T SAVE YOURSELF?
THEY'LL BOTH DIE IF WE DON'T ACT. IF YOU HELP, THEY MAY SURVIVE.
YOU HEARD THE INFO FROM SODA, RIGHT?

RIGHT, MY HOPE IS DASHED COMPLETELY.

JUST THAT ONE OF THE POSSIBLE DOORS HAVE CLOSED...

YES, MA'AM.
SODA, SCISSORS.
ADMIT TO THE FACT THAT A MISSION WAS A FAILURE AND MOVE ON.
THE QUICKER YOU MAKE A DECISION, THE LESS TIME YOU WASTE, THE LESS DAMAGE IS DONE.

I'D LIKE TO SAVE AS MANY LIVES AS POSSIBLE.
I'M GLAD I WAS BORN.
I'LL FIND ANOTHER WAY TO DETOXIFY MYSELF.
YOU'RE RELENTLESS.
WHO KNOWS IF ANY OF US IS RIGHT, EH?
CLEAN UP FOR ME. I'M GOING TO GET SOME REST.
I'M SHOCKED! I CAN'T BELIEVE LULU WAS EVER PREGNANT.
THAT MEANS SOMEONE WAS HER LOVER
THAT'S RUDE!
IF I WAS BORN SEVERAL DECADES EARLIER, MAYBE I WOULD HAVE...
CRASH
MEETING LADY PRIMULA, SODA, LULU... THAT ALONE MAKES MY LIFE WORTHWHILE.
WOULD HAVE WHAT?
MASTER ARE YOU SAYING WHAT I THINK YOU ARE?

SHE'S VERY SMALL, BUT A HAPPY AND HEALTHY GIRL.
REGARDLESS OF HOW SHE WAS CONCEIVED, SHE'S A PROOF OF YOUR LOVE. POLISH HER LIKE THE GEM SHE IS.
IN RETURN, SHE'LL MAKE YOU SHINE AS A MOTHER.
THANK YOU, DR. LULU.
GOOD WORK, LULU.
I SAVED THE MOTHER AND CHILD THIS TIME, BUT MY PHILOSOPHY REMAINS THE SAME.
WOMEN GET PREGNANT EVERY DAY.
I HAVE NO QUALMS ABOUT TERMINATING AN UNWANTED PREGNANCY.

I CAN'T REMEMBER HOW LONG I WAS TRAPPED IN THAT SMALL, DARK SPACE.
I JUST KNEW THAT WHEN I LEFT...
CREAK
WAIT A SEC.
ONLY ONE SURVIVED THIS YEAR, EH?
...MOST EVERYONE WAS DEAD.

LULU!!
LULU, WHAT'S WRONG?
SLAM
DON'T WORRY. I JUST FELT SHORT OF BREATH, THAT'S ALL.
SODA, GET A BLANKET.
LULU, I'M GOING TO CHECK AND MAKE SURE YOU'RE ALL RIGHT. LET ME LOOSEN YOUR CLOTHES!
LULU, SKIN WAS FORCIBLY REMOVED UNDER THAT SCAR. WERE YOU...
YES. I USED TO BE A BASILISK.

Rp. 25/ The End

Apothecarius Argentum
Recipe 26 • Basilisk's Love

THERE'S ANOTHER ONE. MALE.
MALE? FEMALES HAVE MORE USE.
CASTORIA STILL WANTS BOYS.
THAT'S OLD NEWS! BASILISKS ARE FORBIDDEN IN CASTORIA NOW.
HE CAN BE A FOOD TASTER FOR ROYALTY OR SOMETHING. SOME PEOPLE ARE CURIOUS AND PREFER MALES. IT WON'T BE IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND A BUYER.
YOU'RE LUCKY YOU'RE A FEMALE.
WE'LL FIND YOU AN EXCELLENT OWNER.
AM I REALLY LUCKY?
BURN THE BODIES, AS USUAL.
THE OTHER MALE BASILISK... I WONDER WHAT'S HAPPENED TO HIM. THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I SAW ANOTHER BASILISK.
HE MAY NO LONGER BE ALIVE...

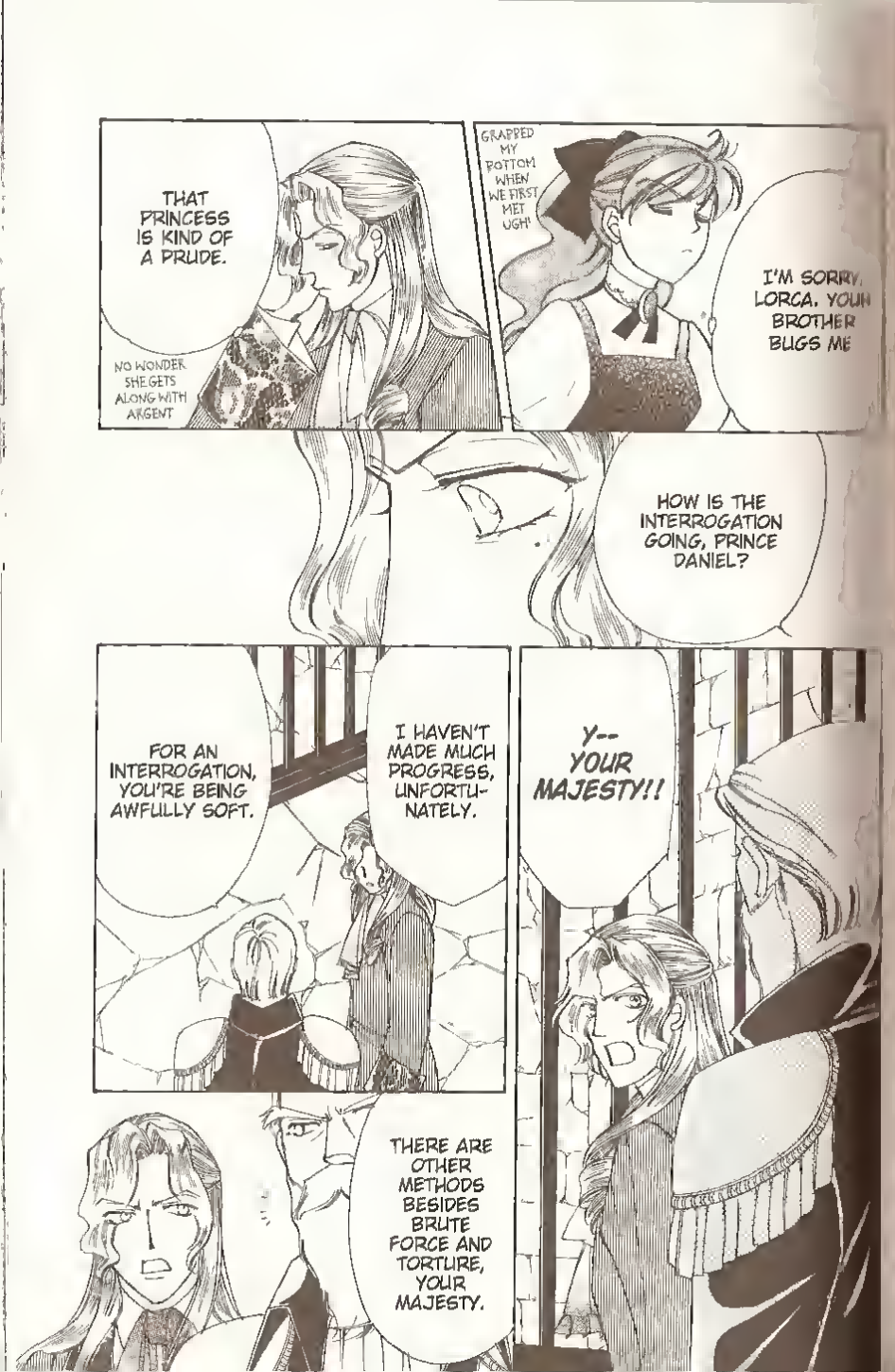
OH DEAR ME. I WANTED TO KEEP THIS A SECRET.
HOW DID YOU? THERE'S NO STONE TO DETOXIFY A BASILISK, RIGHT?
DOES THIS MEAN THERE'S ANOTHER WAY?
I DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN.
HOW FAR DOES YOUR MEMORY GO BACK? DO YOU REMEMBER OTHER KIDS?
I...
THE FACT THAT YOU HESITATE MEANS YOU HAVE MEMORIES. I UNDERSTAND NOT WANTING TO REMEMBER.
DID YOU KNOW THAT FEMALE BASILISKS ARE MORE VALUABLE AND WORTH MORE MONEY?
THAT, I DON'T REMEMBER.

Inside Castoria, Lulu's Clinic.
FEEL BETTER, LULU?
SODA AND POPOLA ARE WATCHING THEM.
ARGENT, DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME. CHECK ON NOLA AND THE BABY.
THEY'RE FINE.
BUT YOU WERE A BASILISK? HOW DID YOU GET PREGNANT ...
AS YOU CAN SEE, I'M A HUMAN BEING NOW. MAYBE IT'S THE SIDE EFFECT OF ALL THAT POISON FOR AN EXTENDED AMOUNT OF TIME.
MY HEART ACTS UP ONCE IN A WHILE.

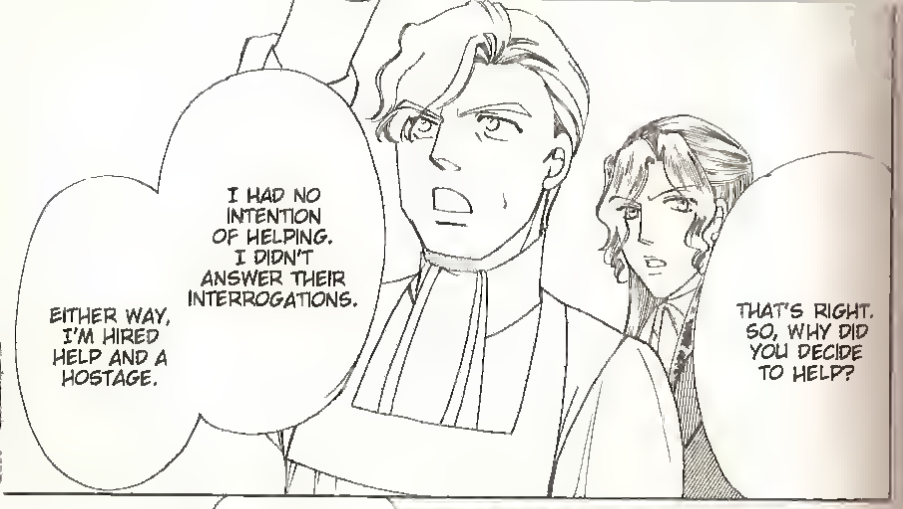
I'M RETURNING TO NAVARA I'M SORRY I CAN'T HELP WITH THE INTERROGATION OF THE BASILISK.
DON'T WORRY, LORCA.
WHO DO YOU THINK I AM? I'M PRINCE DANIEL, THE "BALLADEER OF LOVE."
THERE'S NO WOMAN THAT WON'T OPEN UP TO ME.
LADY PRIMULA, PLEASE SEND MY BROTHER OFF TO HIS JOURNEY.
NOW, LEAVE! YOU HAVE A NATION TO REVITALIZE!
IS HE GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT? IF HE CAN'T SUCCEED WITH THE INTERROGATION, HE MAY LOSE HIS OWN LIFE.
I'M SURE HE'S GOT A VERY GOOD PLAN.
"NO, WE SHOULD HOLD HER HOSTAGE. WE MAY BE ABLE TO DISCOVER THE PLANS OF THE SOUTHERN EMPIRE. I'LL INTERROGATE HER MYSELF."
"SHE'S A BASILISK. YOU CAN'T USE THE POWER OF SEDUCTION THAT YOU'RE RENOWNED FOR ON THIS WOMAN."

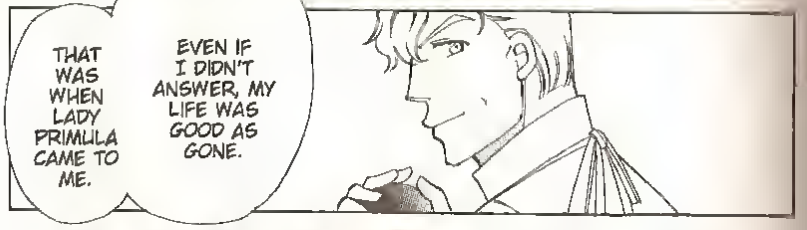
BUT GIRLS, THOUGH... THEY CAN GET CLOSER TO AN OWNER'S ENEMIES.
BOYS ARE USED AS FOOD TASTERS AND LABOR FOR DANGEROUS JOBS LIKE MINING.
I WAS PURCHASED AND ORDERED TO ASSASSINATE, BUT I FAILED. CAN YOU GUESS THE REASON?
ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SUCCESS RATE OF ASSASSINATIONS USING A BASILISK IS PRETTY LOW.
IT'S A STORY OLD AS TIME...
A small country West of Castoria, the King's Castle at Beazol

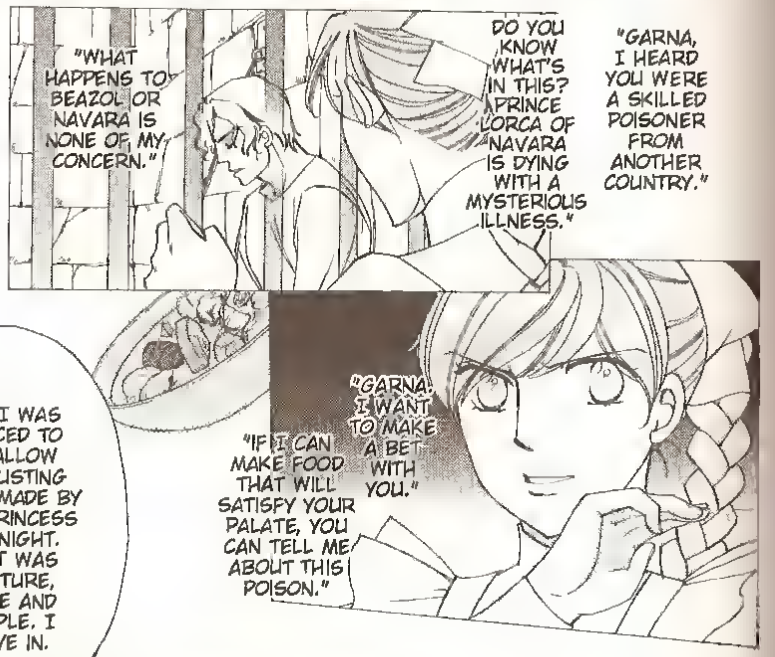
YOU MUST EAT. YOU WON'T REGAIN YOUR STRENGTH, AND YOUR BODY WON'T HEAL.
MY LADY!
YOU'RE NOT MAKING ANY PROGRESS, ARE YOU?
WELL, UH... ARGENT THE SILVER APOTHECARY WAS YOUR LOVER, WASN'T HE?
SEDUCE?
WHAT DO I DO TO SEDUCE A BASILISK?
PERFECT TIMING! I HAVE TO ASK FOR YOUR ADVICE.
JUST DON'T FALL IN LOVE WITH HIM, OKAY?
PLEASE WATCH OVER MY BROTHER, MY LADY.
SURE, SURE.
GOODBYE, MY FUTURE BRIDE!!
I'LL BE SURE TO WRITE!
SAY WHAT?
POT CALLING THE KETTLE BLACK?
PULLING PEOPLE'S HEART-STRINGS!
PRINCE LORCA IS SO GOOD AT.....
THERE'S EVEN DESSERT.
I HAD THE ROYAL CHEF PREPARE A SPECIAL MEAL OF OYSTERS.
CORDA, HERE'S YOUR MEAL.

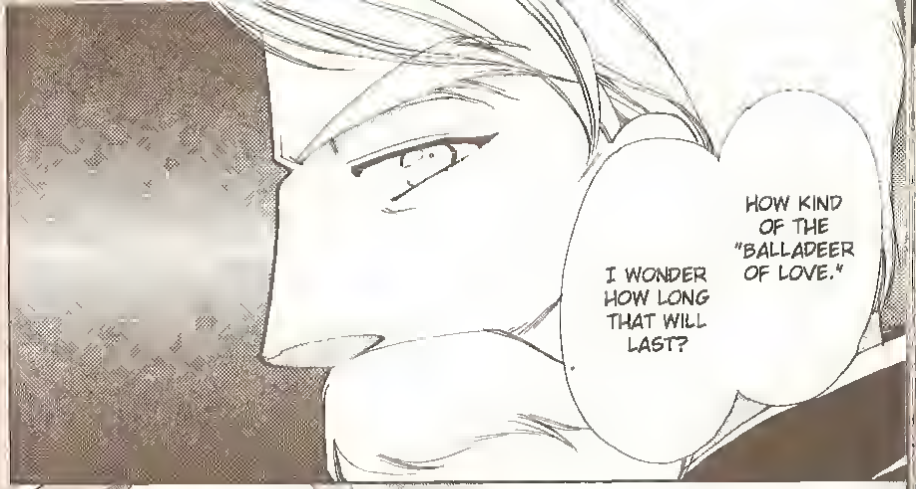

THAT PRINCESS IS KIND OF A PRUDE.
NO WONDER SHE GETS ALONG WITH ARGENT
GRAPPED MY BOTTOM WHEN WE FIRST MET UGH!
I'M SORRY, LORCA. YOUR BROTHER BUGS ME
HOW IS THE INTERROGATION GOING, PRINCE DANIEL?
FOR AN INTERROGATION, YOU'RE BEING AWFULLY SOFT.
I HAVEN'T MADE MUCH PROGRESS, UNFORTU-NATELY.
Y-- YOUR MAJESTY!!
THERE ARE OTHER METHODS BESIDES BRUTE FORCE AND TORTURE, YOUR MAJESTY.

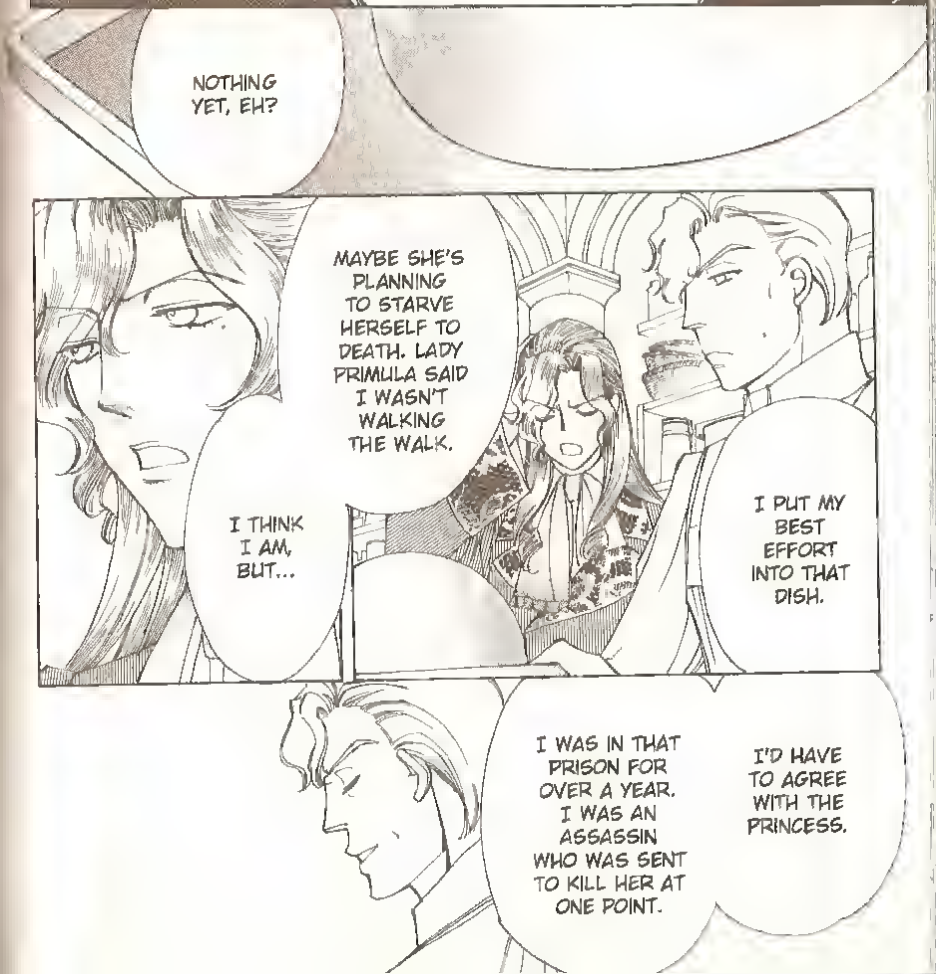
I HAVE BEEN USING EVERY GENTLEMANLY TRICK IN THE BOOK.
I WAS DESPERATE, AND I FOUND MYSELF TALKING WITHOUT THINKING.
PRINCE DANIEL! THAT'S SEXUAL HARASSMENT! YOU WERE SO CONFIDENT, I WAS SURE YOU HAD A WONDERFUL PLAN. INSTEAD, YOU'RE WINGING IT!
IF I WAS ALSO A BASILISK, THIS WOULD BE SO EASY.
YOU'RE NOT WILLING TO WALK THE WALK YET!
MY LADY?
YOU'RE NOT GOING TO SUCCEED AT THAT RATE.


I HAD NO INTENTION OF HELPING. I DIDN'T ANSWER THEIR INTERROGATIONS.
EITHER WAY, I'M HIRED HELP AND A HOSTAGE.
THAT'S RIGHT. SO, WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO HELP?


EVEN IF I DIDN'T ANSWER, MY LIFE WAS GOOD AS GONE.
THAT WAS WHEN LADY PRIMULA CAME TO ME.


"WHAT HAPPENS TO BEAZOL OR NAVARA IS NONE OF MY CONCERN."
DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S IN THIS? PRINCE LORCA OF NAVARA IS DYING WITH A MYSTERIOUS ILLNESS."
"GARNA, I HEARD YOU WERE A SKILLED POISONER FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY."
"GARNA, I WANT TO MAKE A BET WITH YOU."
"IF I CAN MAKE FOOD THAT WILL SATISFY YOUR PALATE, YOU CAN TELL ME ABOUT THIS POISON."
SO, I WAS FORCED TO SWALLOW DISGUSTING SOUP MADE BY THE PRINCESS ALL NIGHT. THAT WAS TORTURE, PURE AND SIMPLE. I GAVE IN.


HOW KIND OF THE "BALLADEER OF LOVE."
I WONDER HOW LONG THAT WILL LAST?

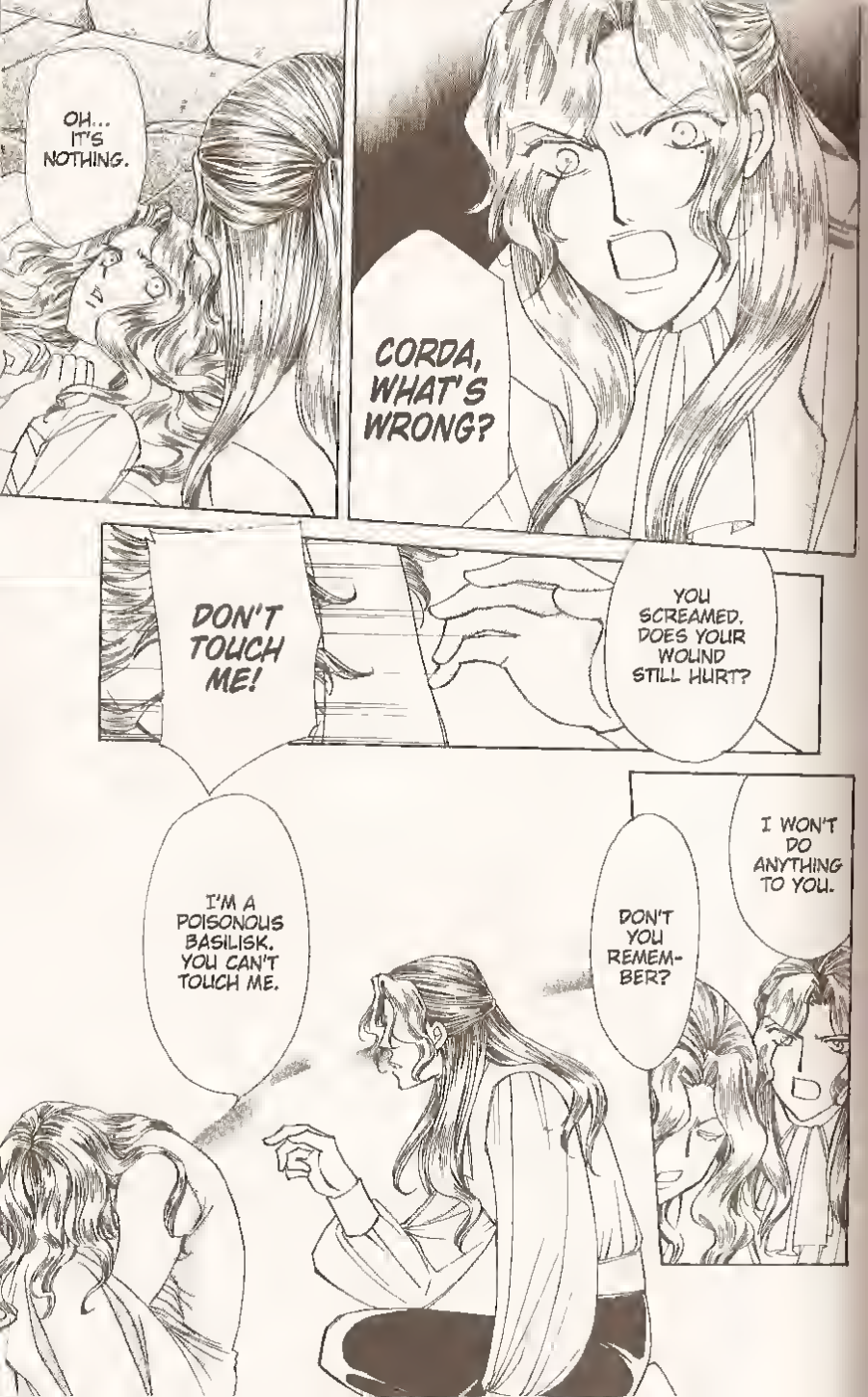

NOTHING YET, EH?
MAYBE SHE'S PLANNING TO STARVE HERSELF TO DEATH. LADY PRIMULA SAID I WASN'T WALKING THE WALK.
I THINK I AM, BUT...
I PUT MY BEST EFFORT INTO THAT DISH.
I'D HAVE TO AGREE WITH THE PRINCESS.
I WAS IN THAT PRISON FOR OVER A YEAR. I WAS AN ASSASSIN WHO WAS SENT TO KILL HER AT ONE POINT.

WALK THE WALK, EH...
EXCUSE ME, PRINCE DANIEL. I HEARD YOUR HIGHNESS CALLED FOR ME.
PRINCE DANIEL, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
IN ORDER TO WALK THE WALK, I FIGURED I WOULD SLEEP HERE FROM NOW ON.
INSIDE PRISON? DON'T YOU THINK THAT'S A BIT DANGEROUS?
SHE CAN'T MOVE VERY MUCH.
NOT DANGEROUS FOR YOU. FOR HER.
SHE'S SO BLUNT.
E-- EITHER CASE!
I THINK SHE'S STILL UPSET THAT I GRABBED HER THAT ONE TIME.

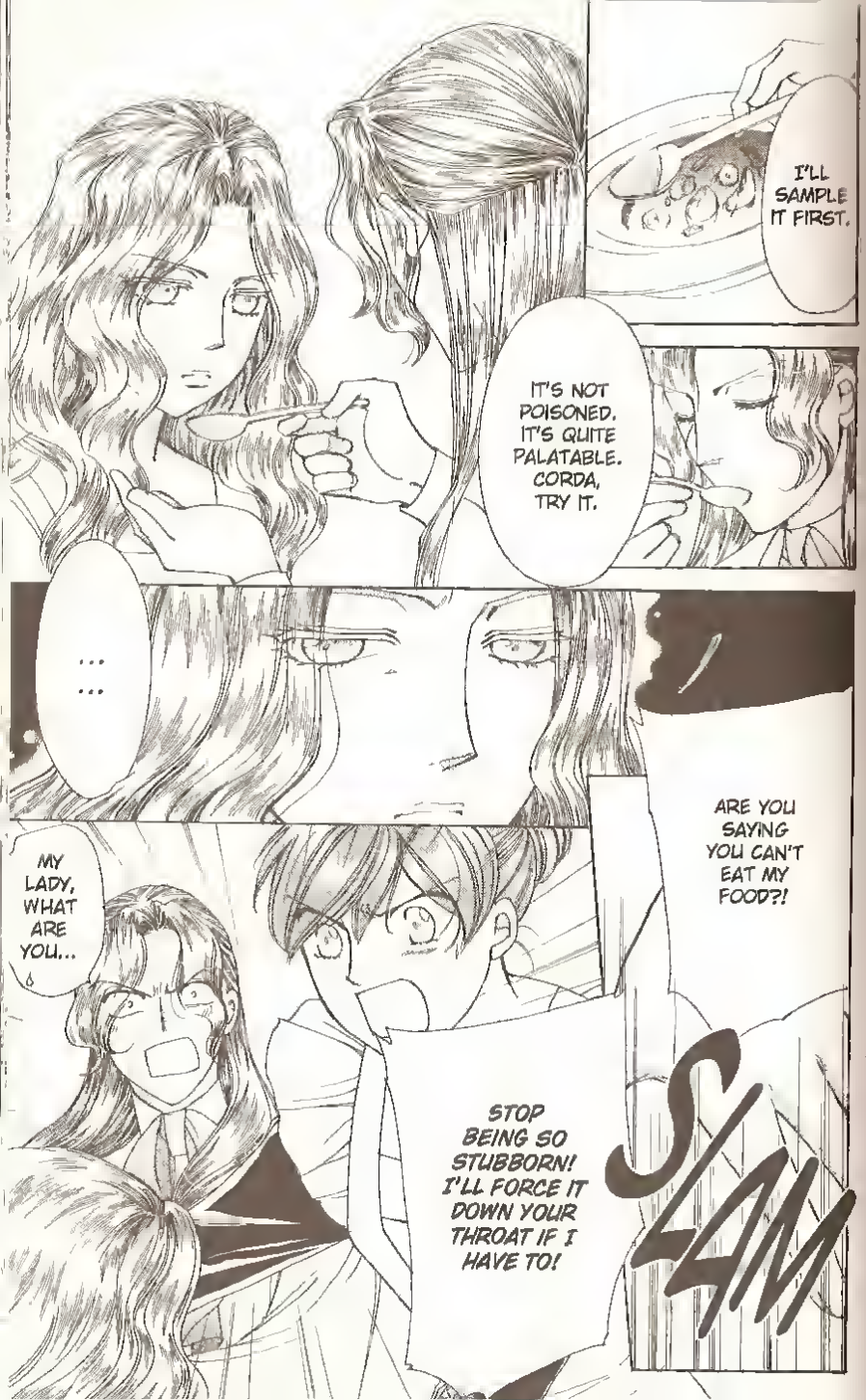
WHY DID I SAVE THAT WOMAN?
WHY AM I SO CONCERNED ABOUT HER?
EVER SINCE I MET HER IN THE GREEN-HOUSE...
YOU'RE THE "BALLADEER OF LOVE." DID SHE PROVIDE AN UNUSUAL CHALLENGE FOR YOU TO CONQUER?
NOW I UNDER-STAND...
YOU HAVE TO WORK HARD TO GET WHAT YOU WANT.
SO, WHY DID YOU RISK YOUR LIFE TO SAVE THAT WOMAN?
WAS IT CURIOSITY OR PITY?

S--- STOP?!
IT'S ACTUALLY ANNOYING. PLEASE STOP.
WHAT? YOU LIKE THAT?
SHIVER
NOBODY HAS EVER TALKED TO ME LIKE THAT BEFORE.
I THINK WE SHOULD GET SOME REST.
THE CELL AT NIGHT IS COLD.
HUFF
CLUTCH

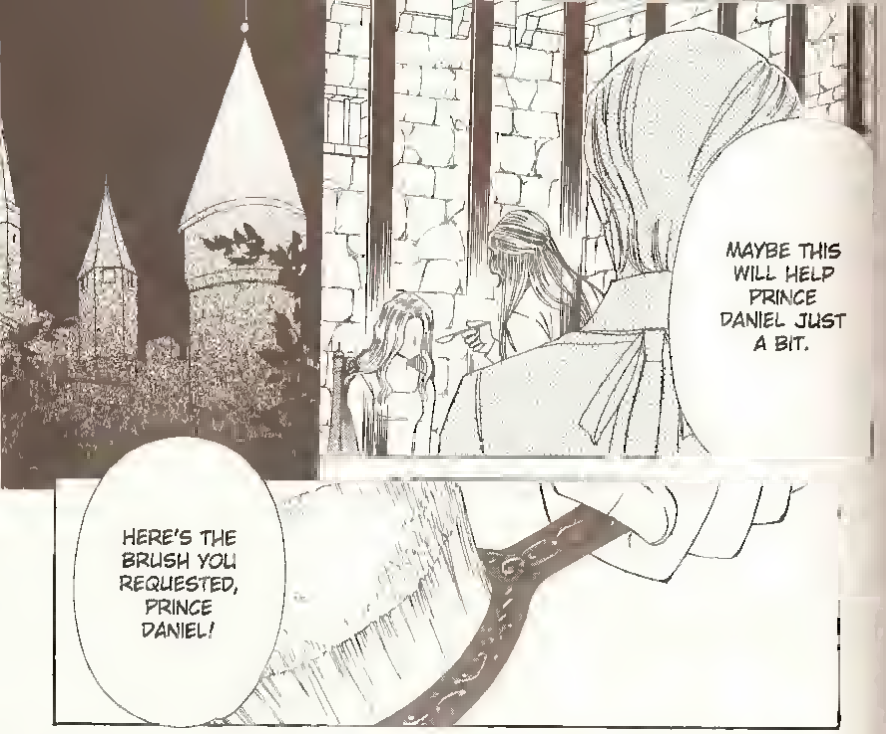
I WOULD LIKE TO REQUEST SOME BLANKETS, SHEETS, TABLE AND A CHAIR.
THERE'S VERY LITTLE NATURAL LIGHT AND THE PLACE SMELLS LIKE MOLD. THE STONE SURROUNDINGS ADD CHILL TO THE AIR.
I REALIZED AFTER BEING IN THIS CELL THAT THIS PLACE IS VERY... STARK!
IT IS A PRISON
WHAT ELSE... UHM...
HE'S REALLY DEMANDING, BUT HE'S TRYING HIS BEST IN HIS OWN WAY, I THINK.
"THE WORLD DROWNS IN YOUR EYES...
THE MISSION OF LOVE... ♪
WHAT ABOUT A SONG...
YOU DON'T CARE FOR LOVE POEMS OR ROMANCE NOVELS.
PLEASE

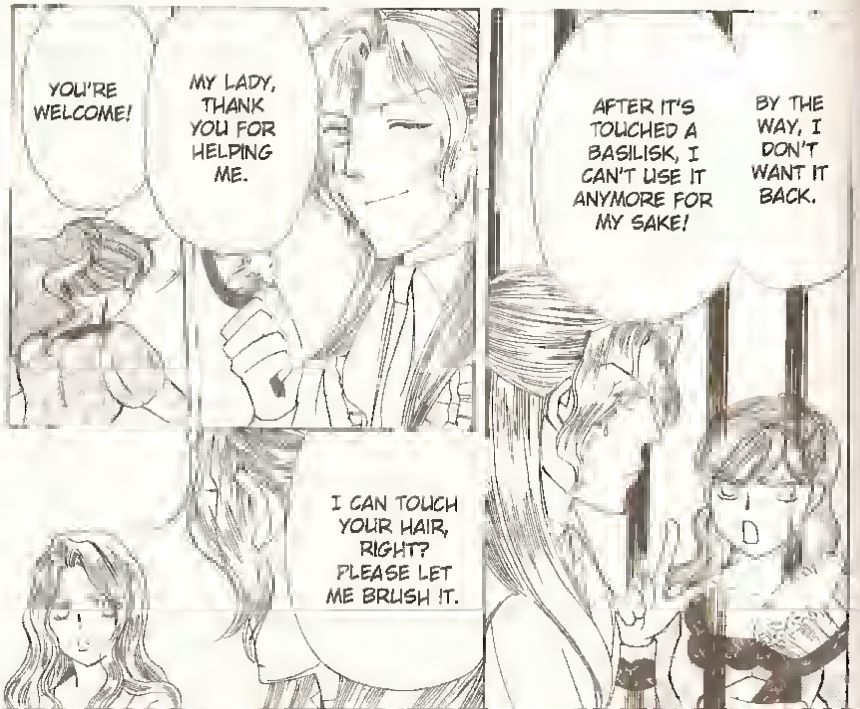

OH... IT'S NOTHING.
CORDA, WHAT'S WRONG?
DON'T TOUCH ME!
YOU SCREAMED. DOES YOUR WOUND STILL HURT?
I'M A POISONOUS BASILISK. YOU CAN'T TOUCH ME.
DON'T YOU REMEMBER?
I WON'T DO ANYTHING TO YOU.

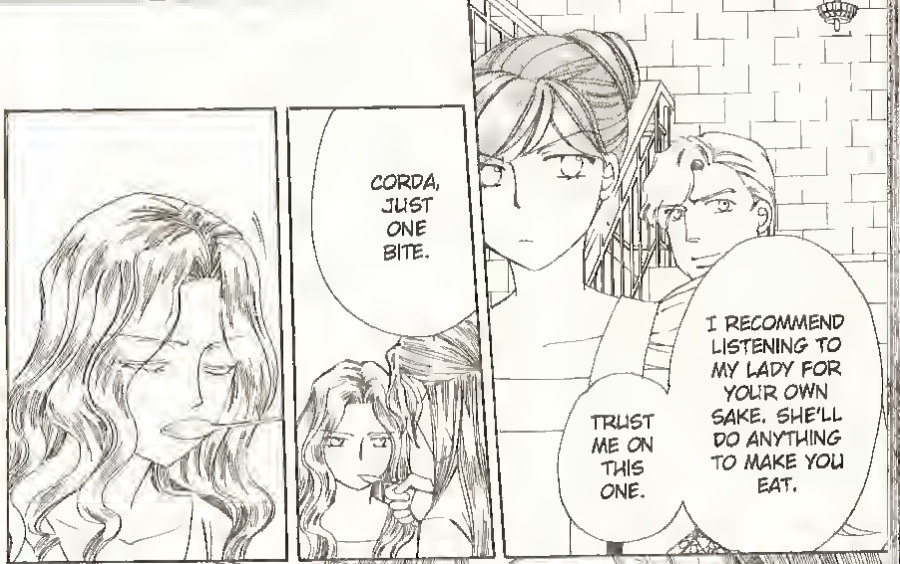
KYAAAAH!
CORDA?

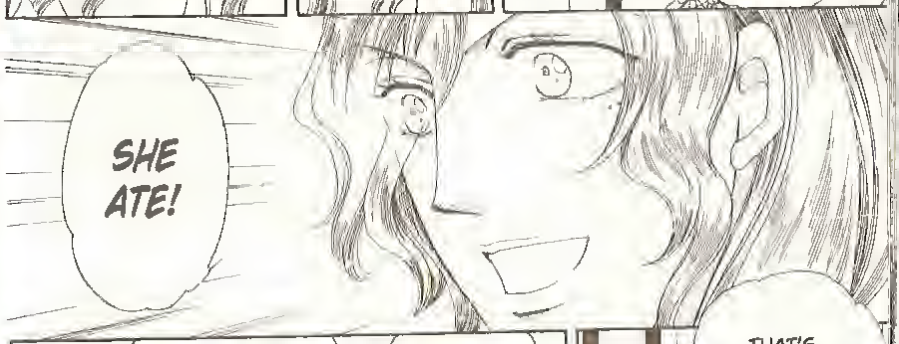

I'LL SAMPLE IT FIRST.
IT'S NOT POISONED. IT'S QUITE PALATABLE. CORDA, TRY IT.
...
...
ARE YOU SAYING YOU CAN'T EAT MY FOOD?!
MY LADY, WHAT ARE YOU...
STOP BEING SO STUBBORN! I'LL FORCE IT DOWN YOUR THROAT IF I HAVE TO!
SLAM

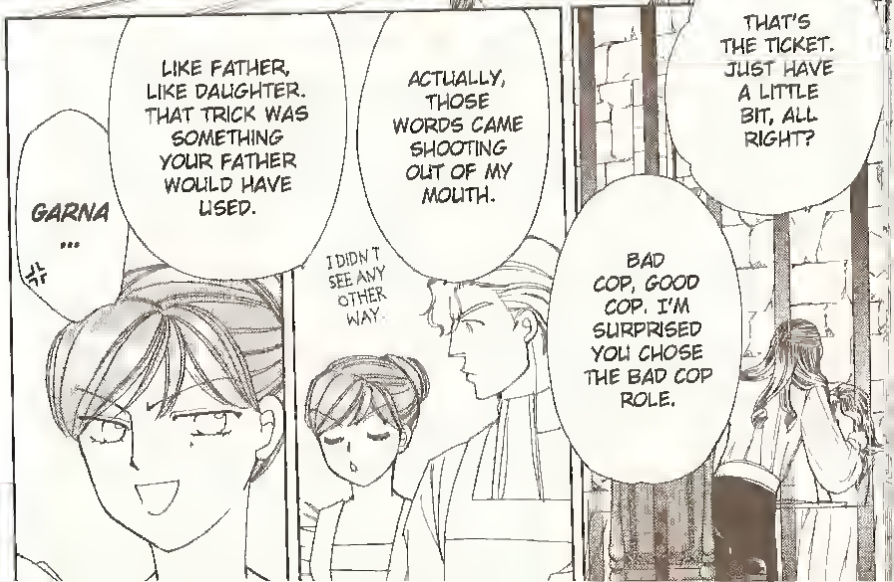
GOOD MORNING, PRINCE DANIEL.
TODAY, I MADE A MEAL JUST FOR YOU BOTH.
I'VE HEARD OF YOUR ATROCIOUS COOKING! YOU'RE OUT TO TORTURE ME!
WHAT DID YOU SAY?
THE ROYAL CHEF GARNA SAID YOUR MEALS MADE HIM BREAK DOWN.
DON'T WORRY, GARNA'S TRAINED ME QUITE A BIT. I'VE GOTTEN A LOT BETTER SINCE THEN!
I'M TRYING TO IMPROVE!
HUH. DESSERT'S MISSING. THAT'S AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE MEAL.
YOU DON'T GET IT, DO YOU?
BASILISKS ARE FED POISON WITH SWEETS. THAT'S WHY THEY CAN'T STAND THEM.
THEY ALSO DON'T CARE FOR FLOWERS BECAUSE THEY WILT UNDER THEIR TOUCH.
OH, I GET IT NOW...
TUG

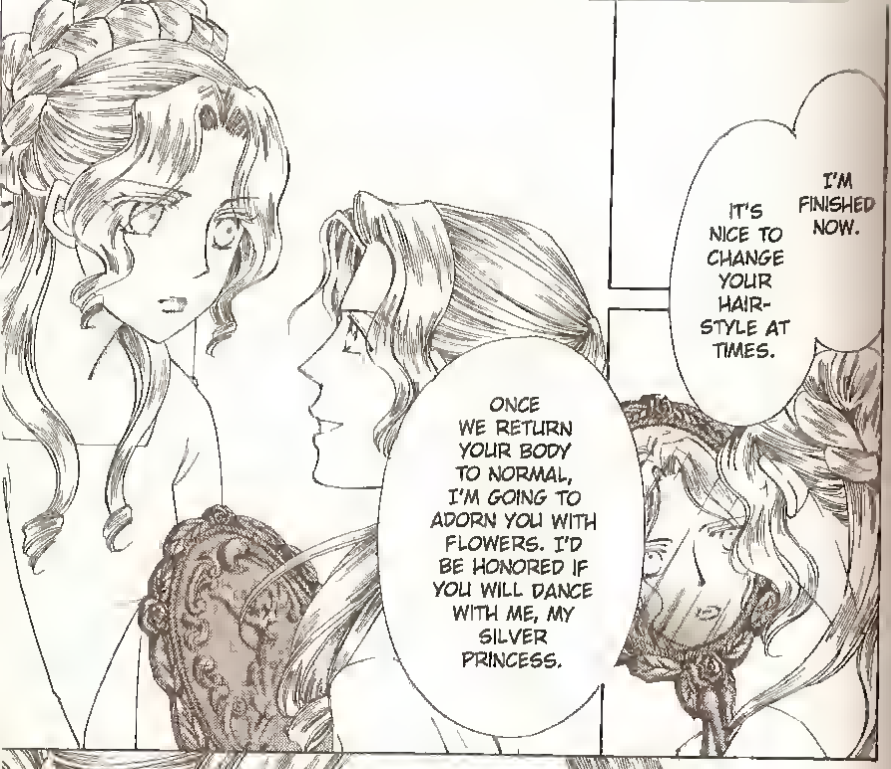

MAYBE THIS WILL HELP PRINCE DANIEL JUST A BIT.
HERE'S THE BRUSH YOU REQUESTED, PRINCE DANIEL!

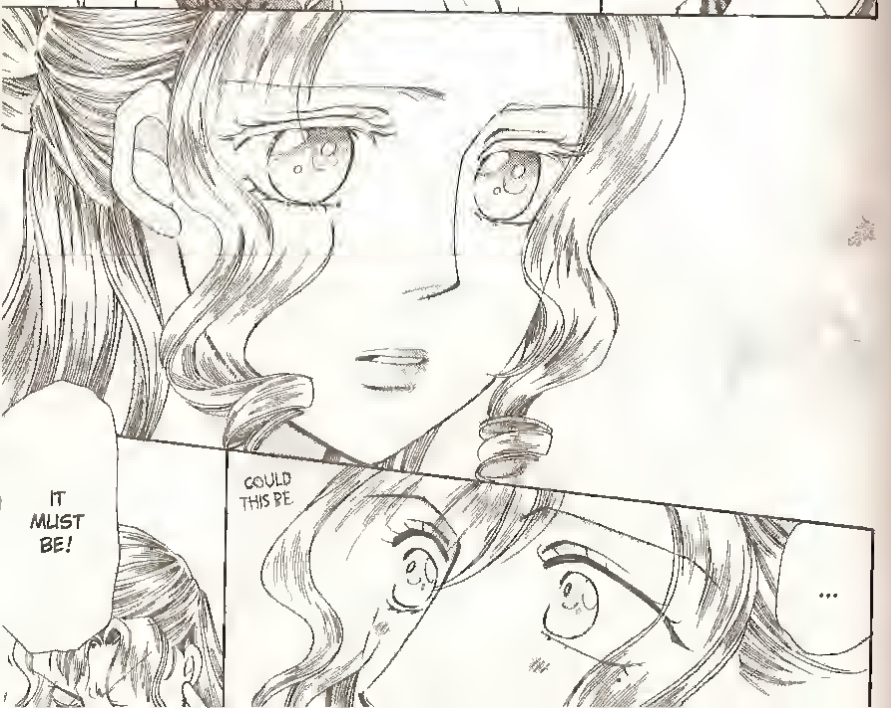

YOU'RE WELCOME!
MY LADY, THANK YOU FOR HELPING ME.
I CAN TOUCH YOUR HAIR, RIGHT? PLEASE LET ME BRUSH IT.
AFTER IT'S TOUCHED A BASILISK, I CAN'T USE IT ANYMORE FOR MY SAKE!
BY THE WAY, I DON'T WANT IT BACK.


CORDA, JUST ONE BITE.
TRUST ME ON THIS ONE.
I RECOMMEND LISTENING TO MY LADY FOR YOUR OWN SAKE. SHE'LL DO ANYTHING TO MAKE YOU EAT.


SHE ATE!

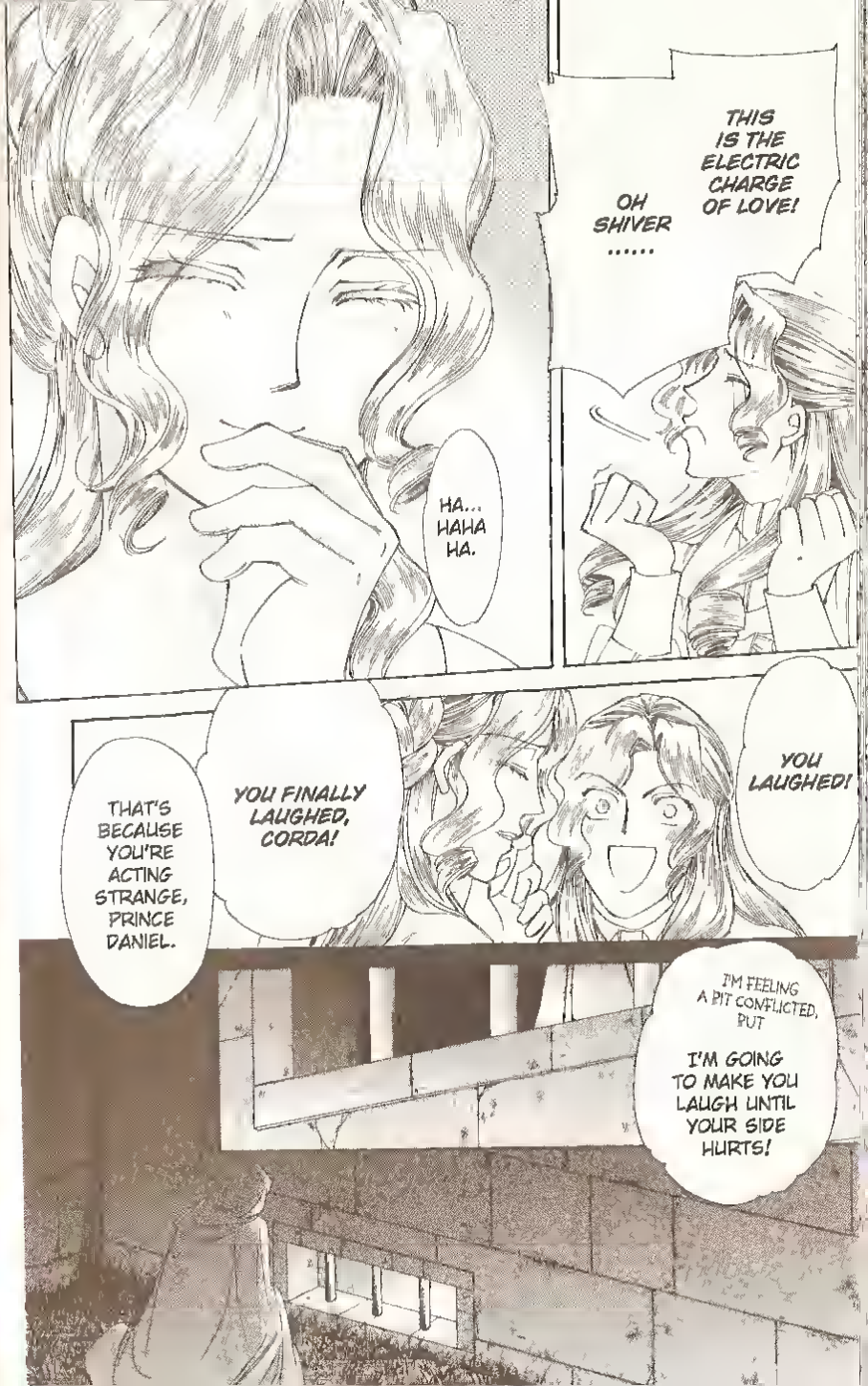

GARNA ...
LIKE FATHER, LIKE DAUGHTER. THAT TRICK WAS SOMETHING YOUR FATHER WOULD HAVE USED.
ACTUALLY, THOSE WORDS CAME SHOOTING OUT OF MY MOUTH.
I DIDN'T SEE ANY OTHER WAY.
BAD COP, GOOD COP. I'M SURPRISED YOU CHOSE THE BAD COP ROLE.
THAT'S THE TICKET. JUST HAVE A LITTLE BIT, ALL RIGHT?


I'M FINISHED NOW.
IT'S NICE TO CHANGE YOUR HAIR-STYLE AT TIMES.
ONCE WE RETURN YOUR BODY TO NORMAL, I'M GOING TO ADORN YOU WITH FLOWERS. I'D BE HONORED IF YOU WILL DANCE WITH ME, MY SILVER PRINCESS.


IT MUST BE!
COULD THIS BE...

YOUR LOCKS ARE GORGEOUS. REMINDS ME OF SPIDER SILK... TRANSLUCENT AND GLOWING.
YOU HAVEN'T MET THE FORMER ROYAL APOTHECARY OF BEAZOL. ARGENT'S ALSO A BASILISK.
HE SET OFF TO CASTORIA TO FIND A STONE THAT WILL DETOXIFY A BASILISK'S BODY.
HE'LL FIND A WAY TO CURE YOU, SO YOU SHOULD HAVE HOPE.
SOME PEOPLE MAY BE FRIGHTENED OF IT, BUT I THINK IT'S BEAUTIFUL.
I UNDERSTAND IT'S THE SIDE EFFECT OF ALL THE POISON YOU WERE FED TO MAKE YOU A BASILISK.

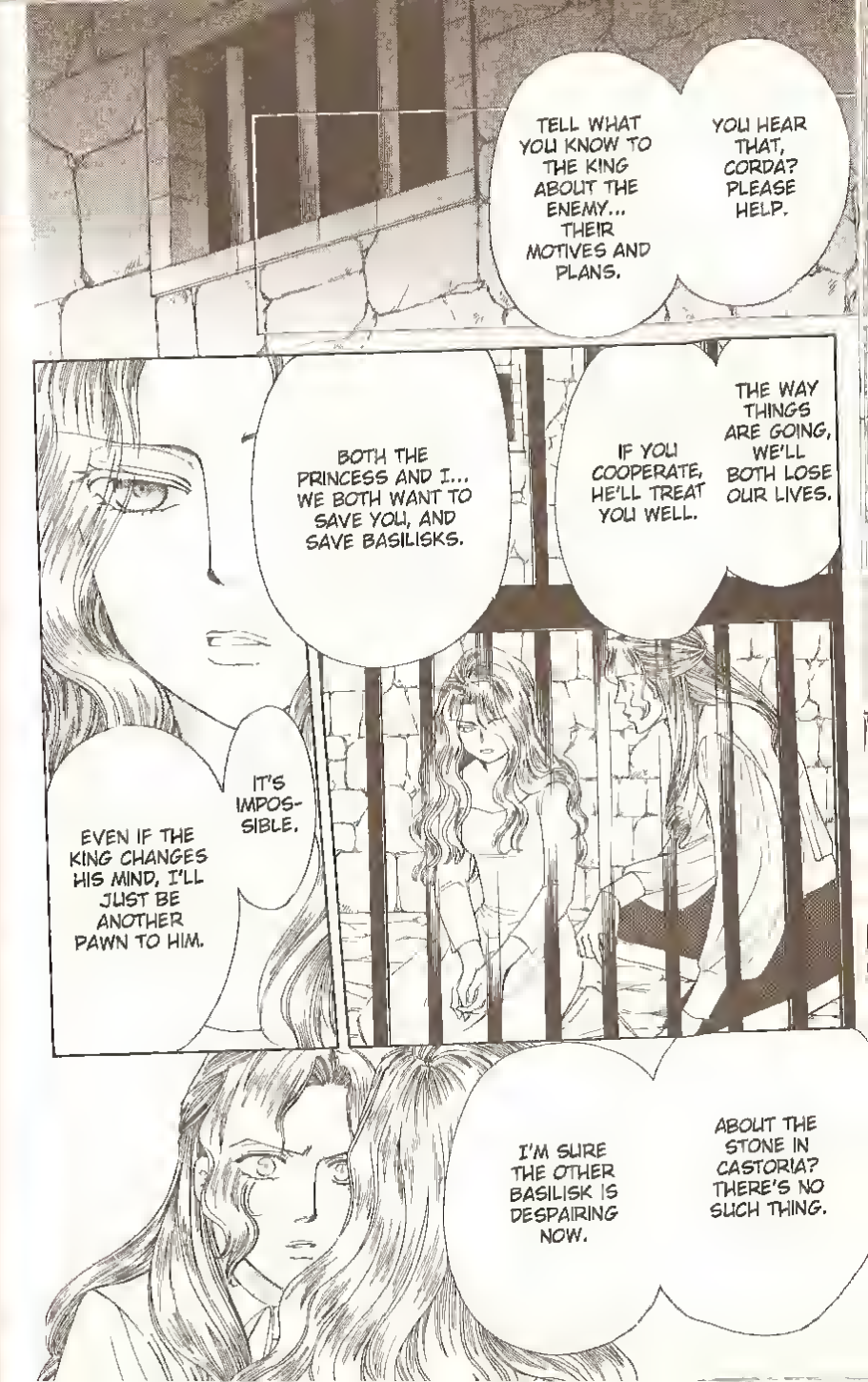
SHE'S BECOMING MORE EXPRESSIVE.
GARNA, I'M REALLY PETTY AND JEALOUS.
?
IF HE STOOD NEXT TO HER...
YES, HER BEAUTY IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM ARGENT.
IT ENHANCED HER BEAUTY EVEN MORE.
FOR A SECOND, I WAS REALLY GLAD ARGENT WASN'T HERE.


HA... HAHA HA.
OH SHIVER .....
THIS IS THE ELECTRIC CHARGE OF LOVE!
YOU FINALLY LAUGHED, CORDA!
YOU LAUGHED!
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE ACTING STRANGE, PRINCE DANIEL.
I'M FEELING A BIT CONFLICTED, BUT
I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU LAUGH UNTIL YOUR SIDE HURTS!

FATHER, WHY ARE YOU SUDDENLY BEING SO HARSH?!
YOU'VE WORN DOWN MY PATIENCE. I SAID YOU HAVE UNTIL TOMORROW TO GET INFORMATION OUT OF THIS WOMAN!
IF YOU FAIL, I'LL EXECUTE YOU BOTH LIKE I PROMISED.
I JUST NEED A LITTLE MORE TIME! I PROMISE YOU I CAN PRODUCE RESULTS!
YOU'RE TOO SLOW.
I'VE WAITED ENOUGH.
WHILE I'M WAITING, THE ENEMY COULD BE MAKING PLANS.
THERE'S STILL TIME UNTIL TOMORROW MORNING. IF YOU WANT TO SAVE YOUR LIFE, DO WHAT YOU NEED TO GET INFORMATION.

YOUR MAJESTY ...
JEALOUSY, EH? THAT JUST MEANS YOU'RE GROWING INTO A WOMAN!
THE BASILISK IS OPENING UP MORE. AT THIS RATE, MAYBE...
PRINCE DANIEL'S TACTICS SEEM TO BE WORKING.
IN THAT CASE, IT'S ALMOST TIME.
YOUR MAJESTY, WHAT DID YOU JUST SAY?

PLEASE, DON'T BOTHER ME ANYMORE...
WHY, CORDA?!
I'M TRYING SO HARD TO SAVE YOU. WHY DO YOU WANT TO DIE SO BADLY!!
IF YOU WANT TO DIE, I'LL KILL YOU MYSELF.
I'D RATHER DIE AFTER MAKING YOU MINE AND DIE AS A MAN IN LOVE.
AFTER ALL, WE'RE BOTH GOOD AS DEAD.

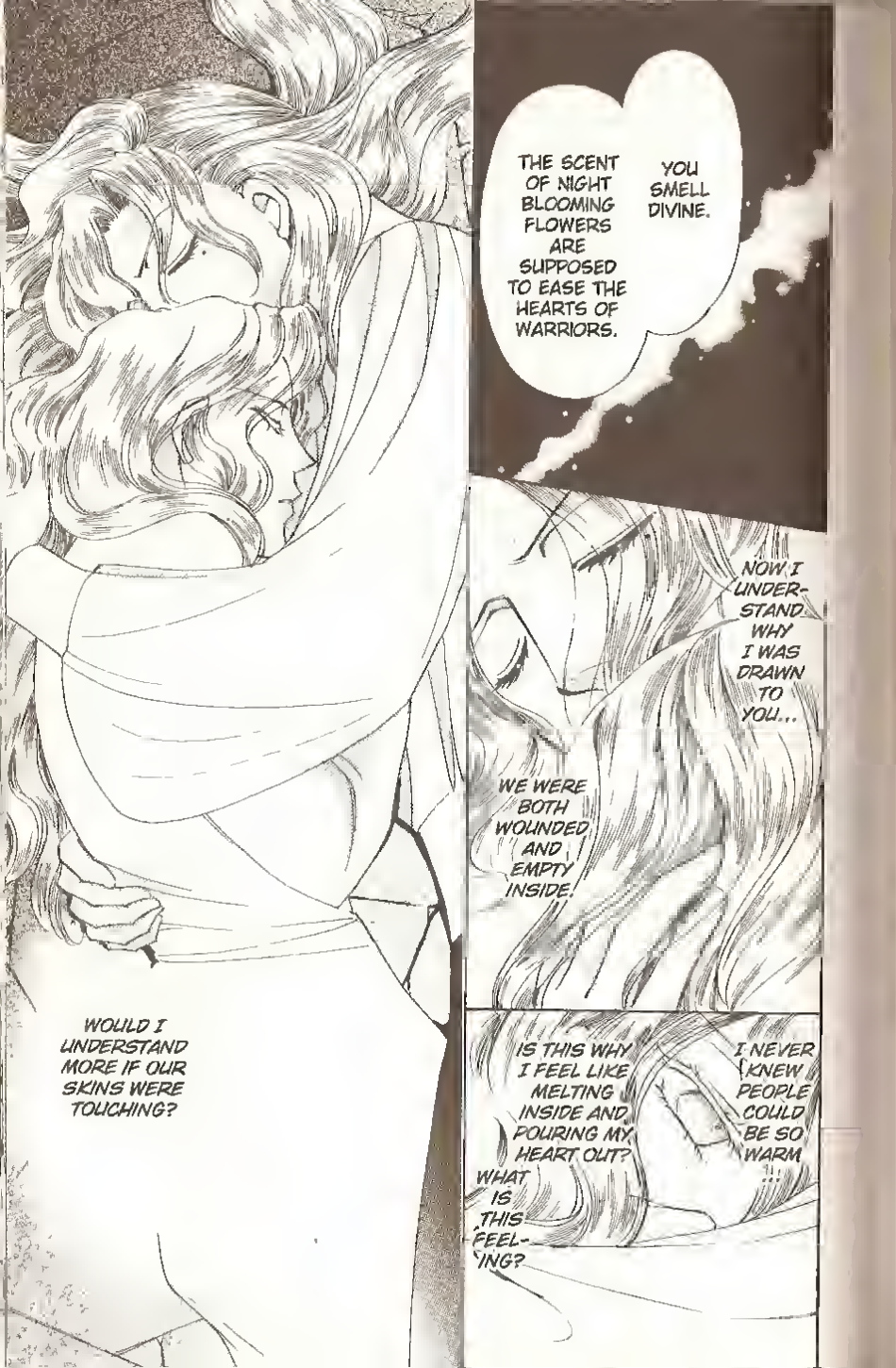

TELL WHAT YOU KNOW TO THE KING ABOUT THE ENEMY... THEIR MOTIVES AND PLANS.
YOU HEAR THAT, CORDA? PLEASE HELP.
BOTH THE PRINCESS AND I... WE BOTH WANT TO SAVE YOU, AND SAVE BASILISKS.
IF YOU COOPERATE, HE'LL TREAT YOU WELL.
THE WAY THINGS ARE GOING, WE'LL BOTH LOSE OUR LIVES.
IT'S IMPOS-SIBLE.
EVEN IF THE KING CHANGES HIS MIND, I'LL JUST BE ANOTHER PAWN TO HIM.
I'M SURE THE OTHER BASILISK IS DESPAIRING NOW.
ABOUT THE STONE IN CASTORIA? THERE'S NO SUCH THING.

PLEASE.
DON'T TOUCH ME ANY MORE.
CORDA ...
I'LL LEAVE THIS CELL. YOU CAN SLEEP ALONE TONIGHT.
I WAS DESPERATE. I LOST MY MIND.
I'M SORRY.
WAIT!
DON'T LEAVE ME ALL ALONE. .
CORDA?

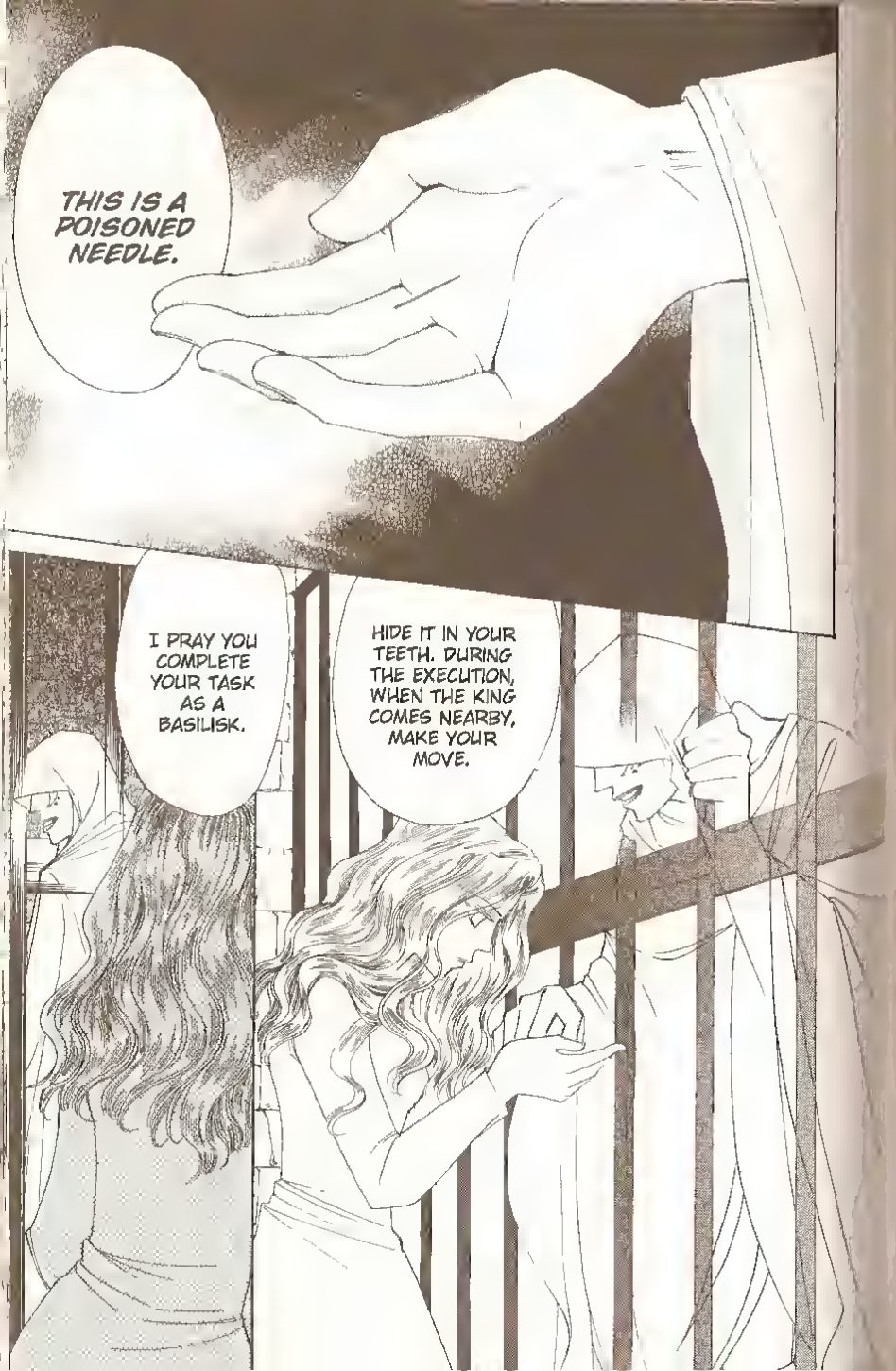
YOU'LL DIE AS A WOMAN.
A SUITABLE END FOR THE "BALLADEER OF LOVE."
"IF YOU WANT TO LIVE, EAT WHAT'S GIVEN TO YOU TO SURVIVE- EVEN IF IT'S POISONOUS."
"KILL THE OTHERS IF YOU HAVE TO."
NO, DON'T TOUCH ME!

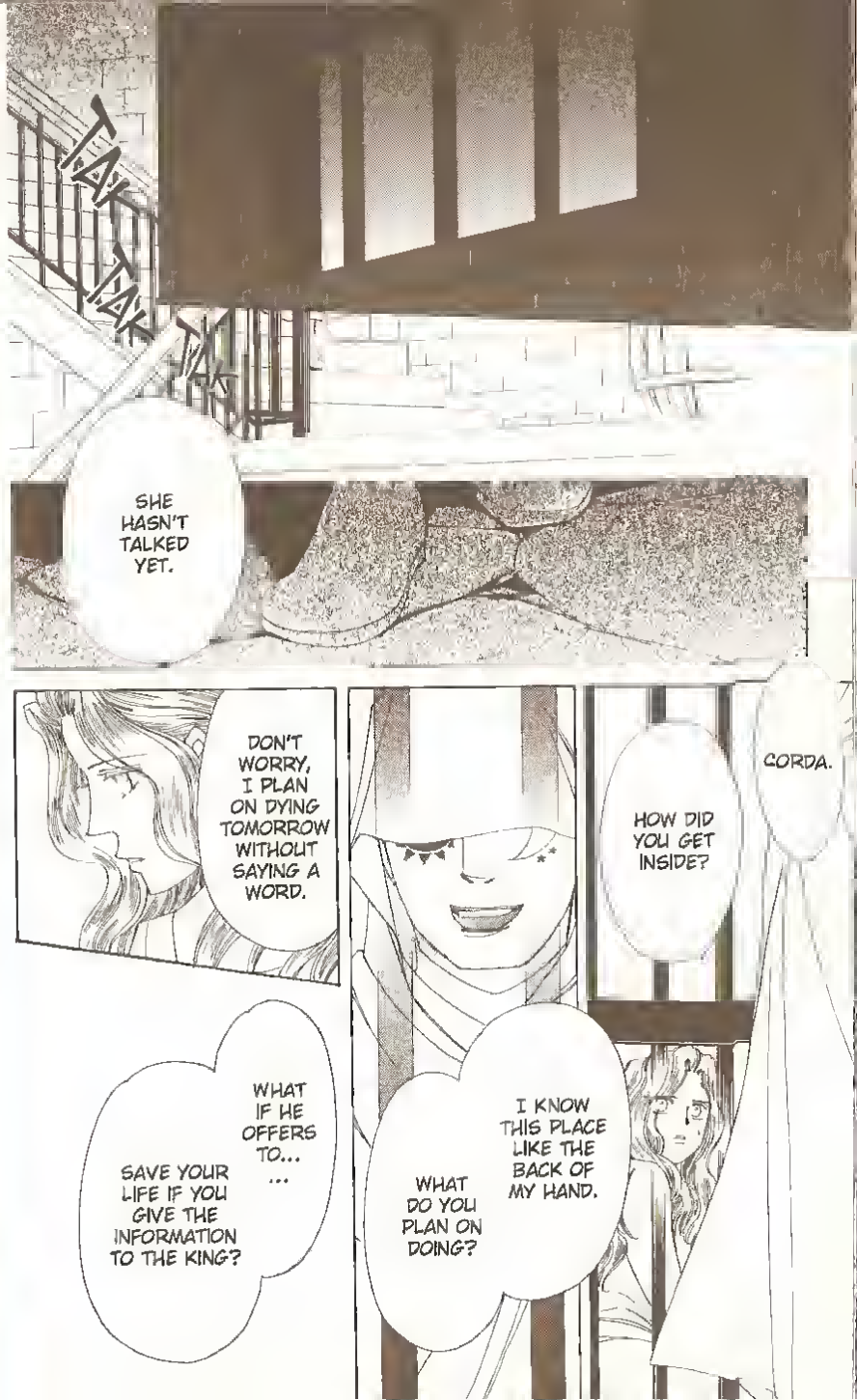
HOWEVER, TRAVELING IN MY MIND... IT WAS STILL ALL MY IMAGINATION, NOT REALITY.
EVERY NIGHT, MY NANNY WOULD READ ME A STORY. THAT WAS MY ONLY PLEASURE.
I WANTED WARMTH, AND WENT TO SEEK IT IN THE ARMS OF WOMEN WILLING TO OFFER IT.
I FELT FREE, LIKE I COULD GO ANYWHERE, BE ANYTHING.
HOWEVER, THAT WAS ONLY A MASK.
IF I COULD BE BEAUTIFUL, BEHAVE GRACEFULLY... THAT ATTRACTED OTHER PEOPLE. THAT WAS MY START AS THE "BALLADEER OF LOVE."
I HAVE MORE MONEY AND STATUS THAN NECESSARY.
I'M GLAD I WASN'T HEIR TO THE THRONE.
IN REALITY, I WAS AN UGLY MAN INSIDE. IN PRIVATE, I WOULDN'T THINK TWICE ABOUT STRIKING A WOMAN.

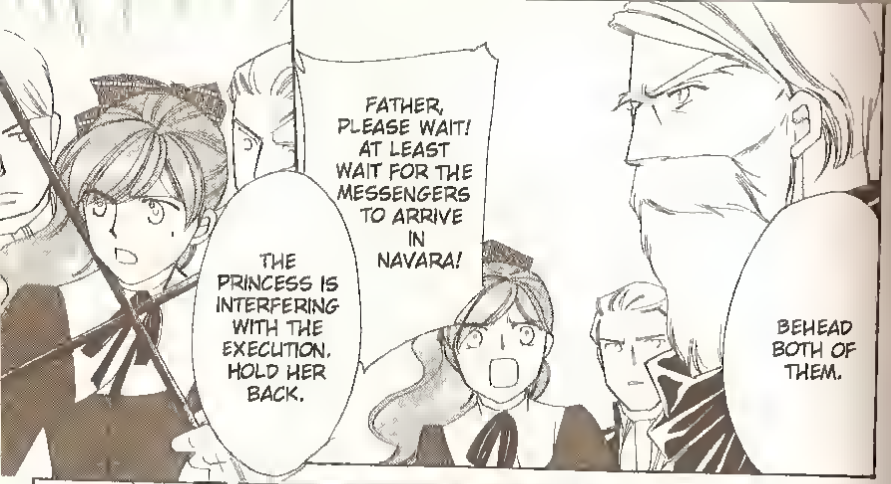
SIZZLE SIZZLE SIZZLE
I DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE.
YOU'RE ALREADY AWARE I'M THE SECOND PRINCE OF NAVARA. ALL THREE BROTHERS HAVE DIFFERENT MOTHERS.
THIS WILL BE OUR LAST NIGHT, SO LET ME TALK ABOUT MYSELF.
...SHE ABANDONED ME TO A NANNY AND FOUND ANOTHER LOVER.
MY MOTHER WAS A TYPICAL ROYAL MISTRESS. ONCE SHE GAINED STATUS AND MONEY AFTER BEARING A SON...
YOU DIDN'T SEEM TO TAKE INTEREST IN ME, SO I DIDN'T TALK ABOUT MYSELF BEFORE.

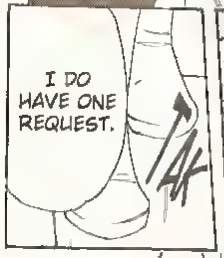

WOULD I UNDERSTAND MORE IF OUR SKINS WERE TOUCHING?
THE SCENT OF NIGHT BLOOMING FLOWERS ARE SUPPOSED TO EASE THE HEARTS OF WARRIORS.
YOU SMELL DIVINE.
NOW I UNDER-STAND WHY I WAS DRAWN TO YOU...
WE WERE BOTH WOUNDED AND EMPTY INSIDE.
IS THIS WHY I FEEL LIKE MELTING INSIDE AND POURING MY HEART OUT?
I NEVER KNEW PEOPLE COULD BE SO WARM ...
WHAT IS THIS FEEL-ING?

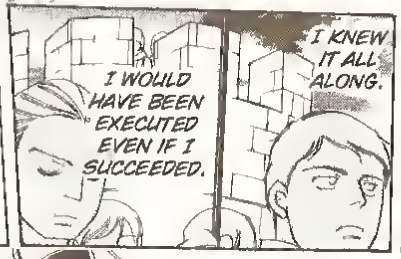
CORDA?
IT'S NOT YOU.
I WAS SCARED BECAUSE THIS PLACE REMINDED ME OF THAT PLACE.
IT'S SIMILAR TO... ...
THE PLACE I GREW UP. THAT COLD, DARK PLACE...
I COULDN'T HELP IT. I...
CORDA.
I WON'T DO ANYTHING BUT HOLD YOU. CAN I DO THAT 'TIL MORNING?

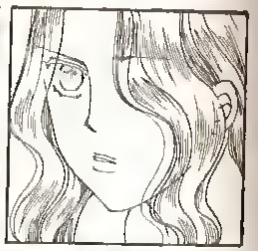

THIS IS A POISONED NEEDLE.
I PRAY YOU COMPLETE YOUR TASK AS A BASILISK.
HIDE IT IN YOUR TEETH. DURING THE EXECUTION, WHEN THE KING COMES NEARBY, MAKE YOUR MOVE.


TAK TAK TAK
SHE HASN'T TALKED YET.
DON'T WORRY, I PLAN ON DYING TOMORROW WITHOUT SAYING A WORD.
SAVE YOUR LIFE IF YOU GIVE THE INFORMATION TO THE KING?
WHAT IF HE OFFERS TO... ...
WHAT DO YOU PLAN ON DOING?
I KNOW THIS PLACE LIKE THE BACK OF MY HAND.
HOW DID YOU GET INSIDE?
CORDA.

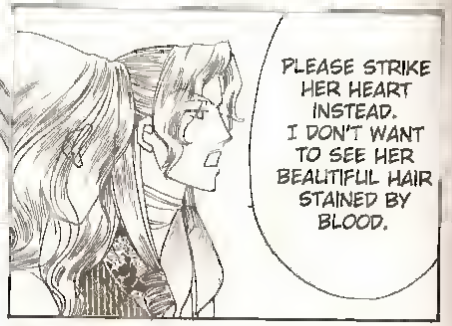

FATHER, PLEASE WAIT! AT LEAST WAIT FOR THE MESSENGERS TO ARRIVE IN NAVARA!
THE PRINCESS IS INTERFERING WITH THE EXECUTION. HOLD HER BACK.
BEHEAD BOTH OF THEM.


I DO HAVE ONE REQUEST.

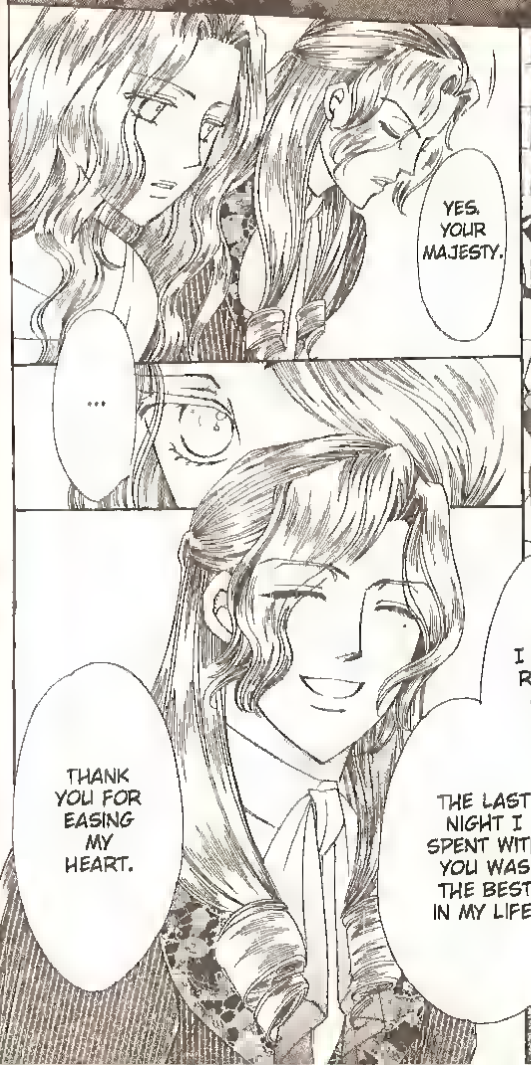

I WOULD HAVE BEEN EXECUTED EVEN IF I SUCCEEDED.
I KNEW IT ALL ALONG.



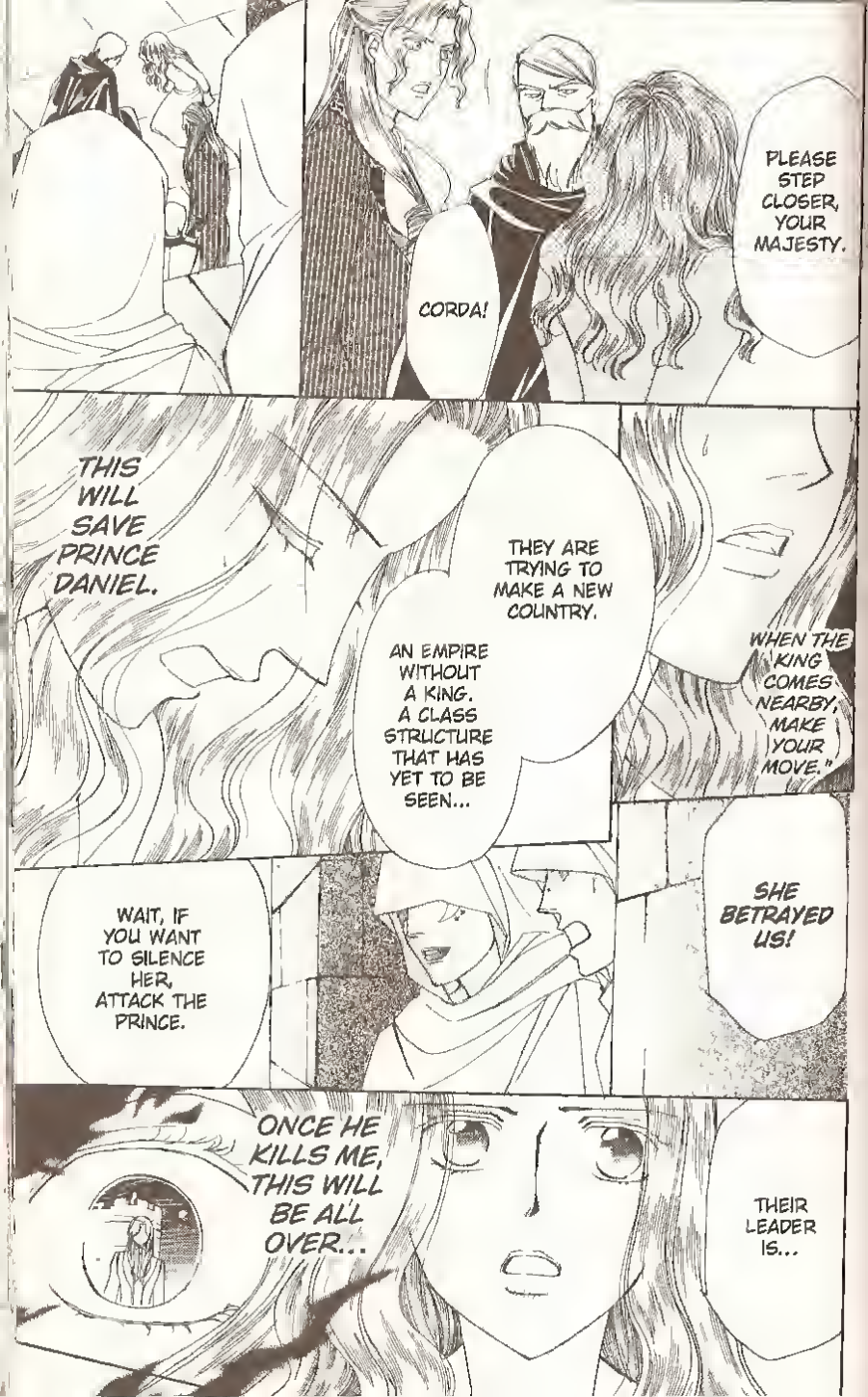
WAIT!


PLEASE STRIKE HER HEART INSTEAD. I DON'T WANT TO SEE HER BEAUTIFUL HAIR STAINED BY BLOOD.

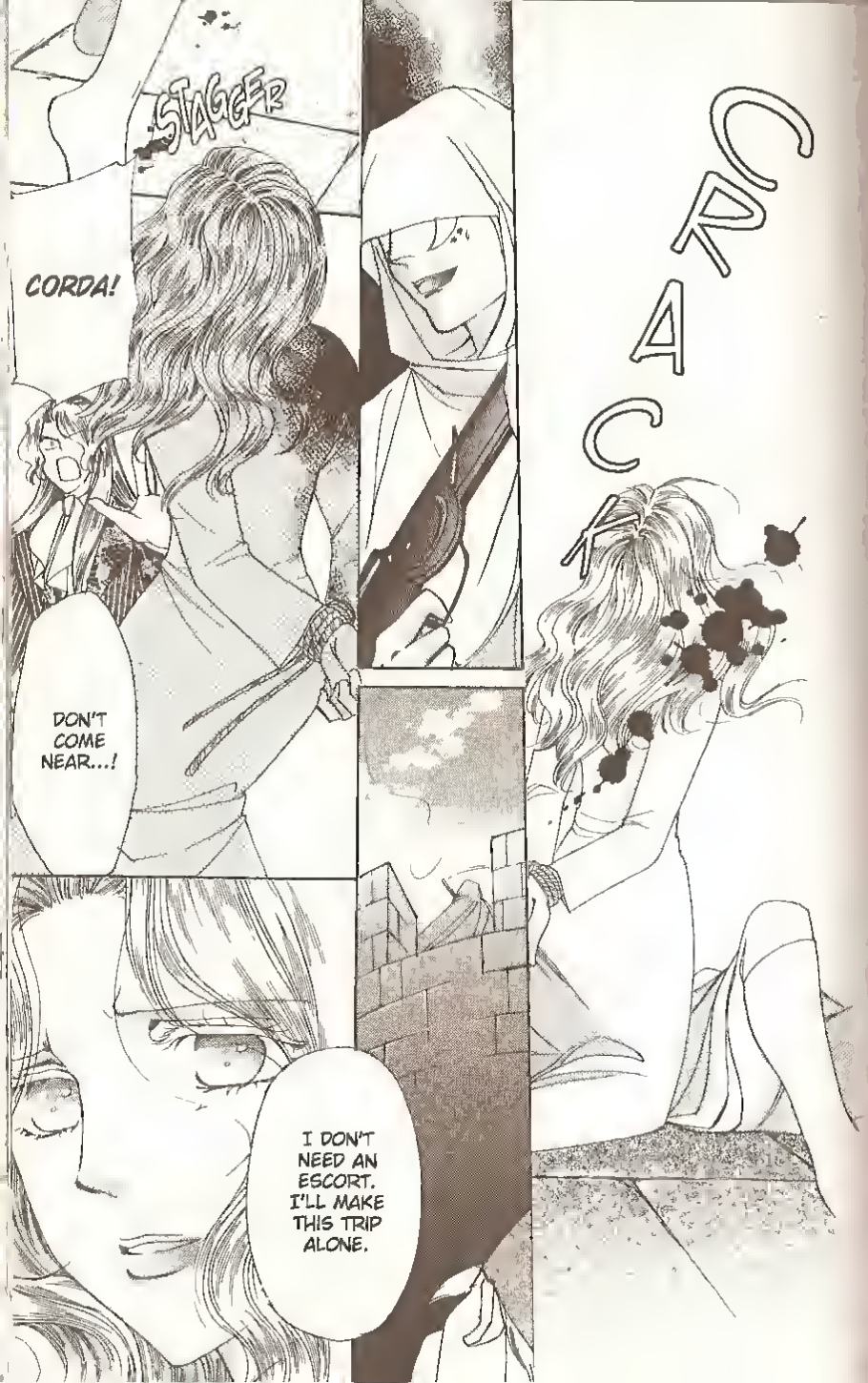
DON'T WORRY. I'LL ESCORT YOU TO THE OTHER SIDE, MY SILVER PRINCESS.


YES, YOUR MAJESTY.
...
THANK YOU FOR EASING MY HEART.
I HAVE NO REGRETS, CORDA.
THE LAST NIGHT I SPENT WITH YOU WAS THE BEST IN MY LIFE.

PRINCE DANIEL, YOU UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'LL ALSO BE EXECUTED AS A TRAITOR...
...FOR FAILING TO SUCCESSFULLY INTERROGATE THIS WOMAN.


PLEASE STEP CLOSER, YOUR MAJESTY.
CORDA!
THIS WILL SAVE PRINCE DANIEL.
THEY ARE TRYING TO MAKE A NEW COUNTRY.
AN EMPIRE WITHOUT A KING. A CLASS STRUCTURE THAT HAS YET TO BE SEEN...
WHEN THE KING COMES NEARBY, MAKE YOUR MOVE."
SHE BETRAYED US!
WAIT, IF YOU WANT TO SILENCE HER, ATTACK THE PRINCE.
ONCE HE KILLS ME, THIS WILL BE ALL OVER...
THEIR LEADER IS...

CORDA?
UNTIE THE PRINCE.
PLEASE EXPLAIN THE INTENTIONS OF THE COUNTRY YOU SERVE.
HIS MAJESTY WAS WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT. HE WAS WAITING FOR HER SYMPATHY TOWARDS PRINCE DANIEL TO BREAK HER SILENCE.
THE KING IS STILL SHARPER THAN THE PRINCESS.
PLEASE WAIT!
I'LL SPEAK!
PLEASE SPARE PRINCE DANIEL'S LIFE!

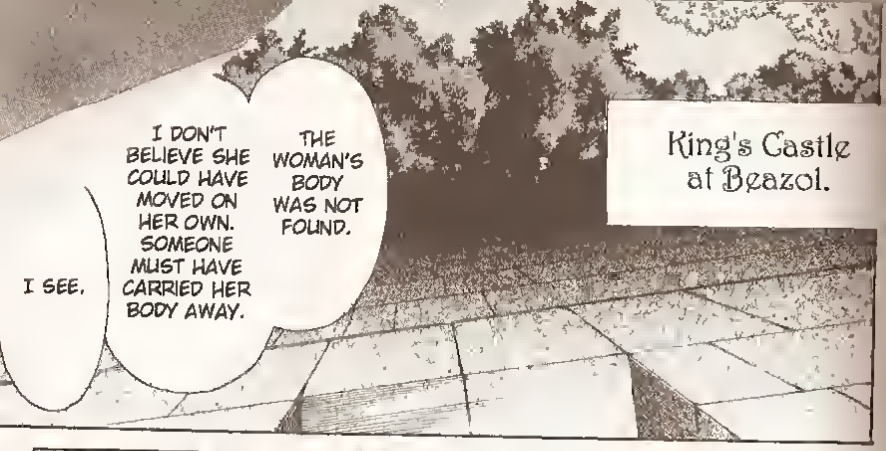

STAGGER
CORDA!
DON'T COME NEAR...!
I DON'T NEED AN ESCORT. I'LL MAKE THIS TRIP ALONE.
CRACK

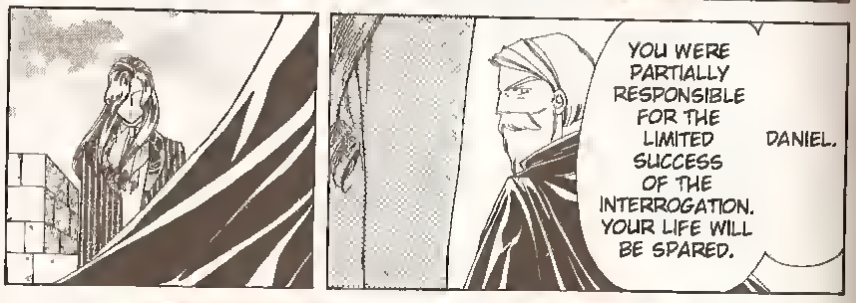
PRINCE DANIEL!
CORDA!!
PRINCE DANIEL, MOVE!

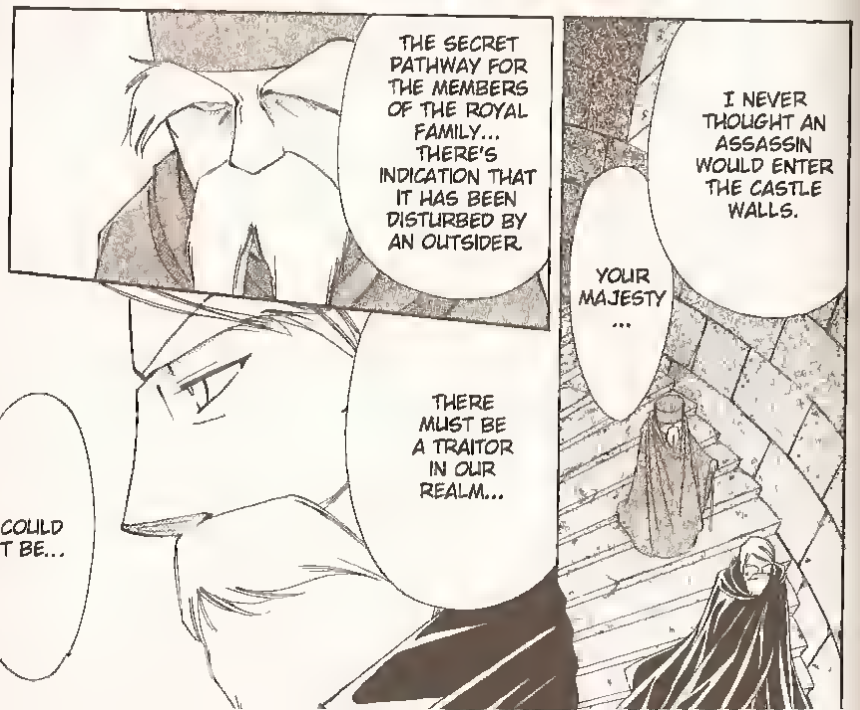
I FAILED MY TASK AS AN ASSASSIN. AS A RESULT, I WAS SOLD OFF TO CASTORIA.
AT THE TIME, CASTORIA HAD MANY BASILISKS WORKING THEIR MINES.
SOMEONE THOUGHT OF USING FEMALE BASILISKS AS PROSTITUTES TO SERVE THE MALE BASILISKS.
BASILISKS ARE HUMANS AFTER ALL.
I HAD AN ENDLESS STREAM OF CUSTOMERS. SOON, I WAS WITH CHILD.
IT MAY SOUND STRANGE, BUT I CHOSE TO GIVE BIRTH. AFTER ALL, I FELT IT WAS A BLESSING.
SOON, MY BODY STARTED TO DETOXIFY ON ITS OWN.
I SHOULD HAVE FIGURED IT OUT...

WHILE TRYING TO GAIN TRUST OF THEIR TARGET, THEY START TO DEVELOP FEELINGS FOR THEM
TRAGICALLY, SOME EVEN FALL IN LOVE WITH THEIR TARGET.
AFTER ALL, BASILISKS AREN'T USE TO BEING TREATED WITH TRUST OR CARE.

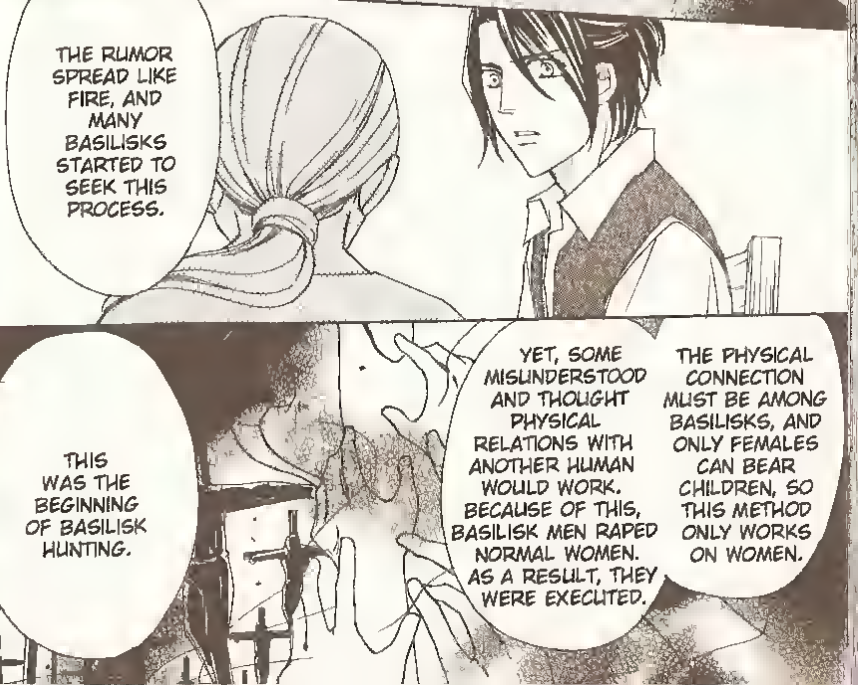
CORDA!
GOODBYE, MY GOLDEN PRINCE.
THE REASON THAT THE BASILISKS OFTEN FAIL TO ASSASSINATE THEIR TARGETS...
...IS SIMPLE.

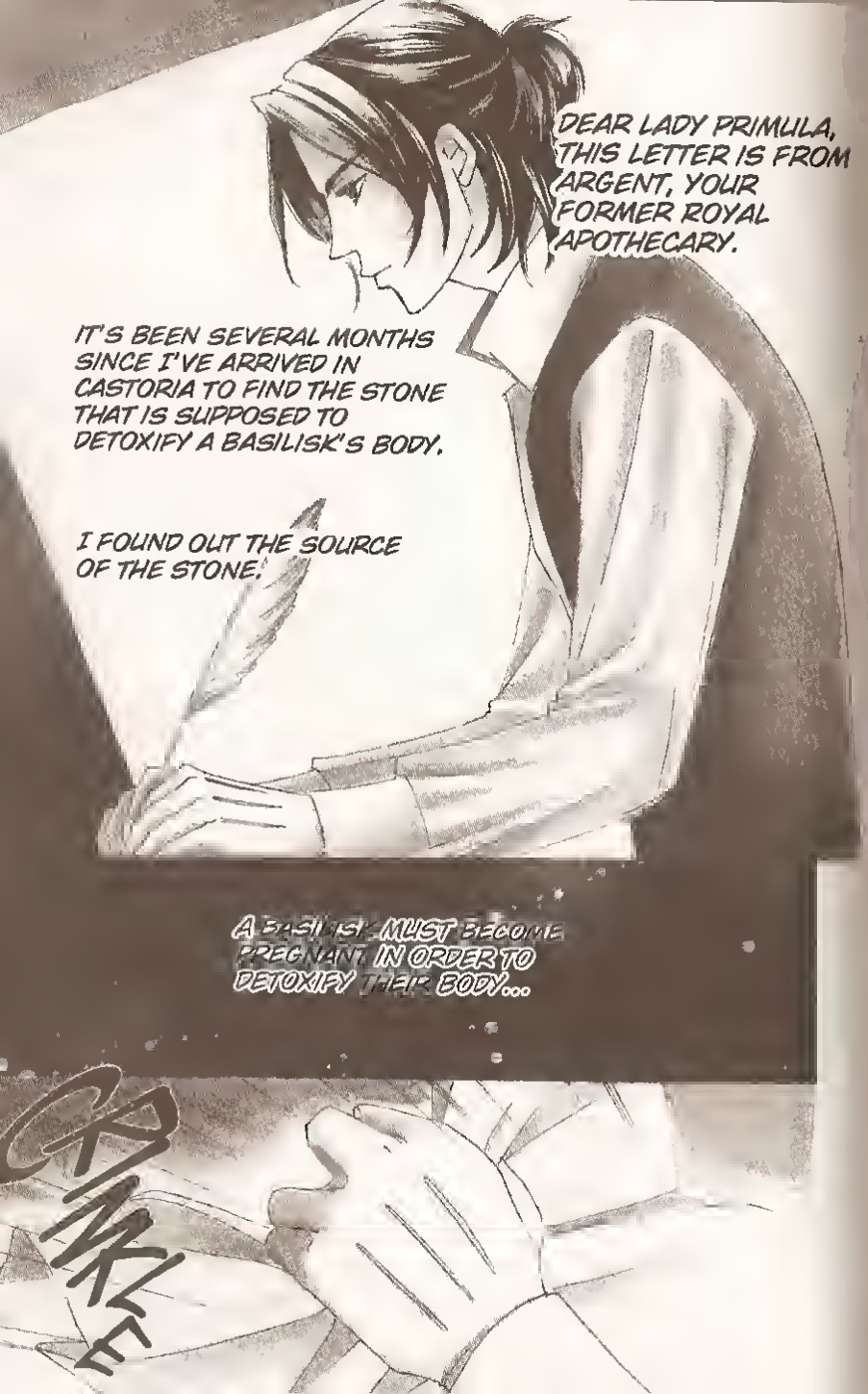

King's Castle at Beazol.
THE WOMAN'S BODY WAS NOT FOUND.
I DON'T BELIEVE SHE COULD HAVE MOVED ON HER OWN. SOMEONE MUST HAVE CARRIED HER BODY AWAY.
I SEE.


DANIEL.
YOU WERE PARTIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE LIMITED SUCCESS OF THE INTERROGATION. YOUR LIFE WILL BE SPARED.


THE SECRET PATHWAY FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ROYAL FAMILY... THERE'S INDICATION THAT IT HAS BEEN DISTURBED BY AN OUTSIDER.
I NEVER THOUGHT AN ASSASSIN WOULD ENTER THE CASTLE WALLS.
YOUR MAJESTY ...
THERE MUST BE A TRAITOR IN OUR REALM...
COULD IT BE...

WHAT I GAVE BIRTH TO WAS NOT A HUMAN BEING, BUT A CLUMP OF POISON.
THE STONE THAT DETOXIFIES A BASILISK IS THE PROOF OF PHYSICAL LOVE.

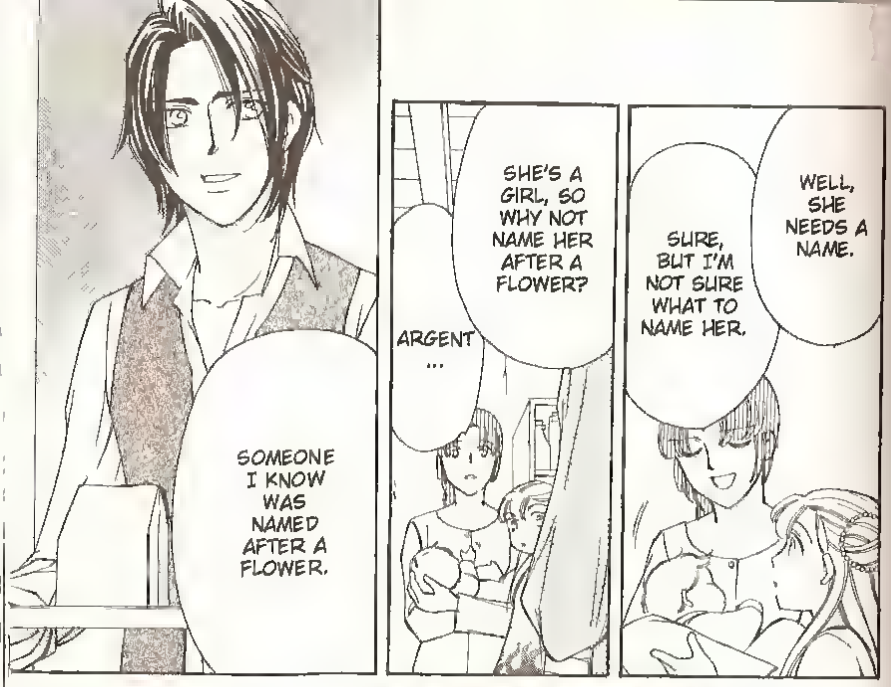

THE RUMOR SPREAD LIKE FIRE, AND MANY BASILISKS STARTED TO SEEK THIS PROCESS.
THIS WAS THE BEGINNING OF BASILISK HUNTING.
YET, SOME MISUNDERSTOOD AND THOUGHT PHYSICAL RELATIONS WITH ANOTHER HUMAN WOULD WORK. BECAUSE OF THIS, BASILISK MEN RAPED NORMAL WOMEN. AS A RESULT, THEY WERE EXECUTED.
THE PHYSICAL CONNECTION MUST BE AMONG BASILISKS, AND ONLY FEMALES CAN BEAR CHILDREN, SO THIS METHOD ONLY WORKS ON WOMEN.


DEAR LADY PRIMULA, THIS LETTER IS FROM ARGENT, YOUR FORMER ROYAL APOTHECARY.
IT'S BEEN SEVERAL MONTHS SINCE I'VE ARRIVED IN CASTORIA TO FIND THE STONE THAT IS SUPPOSED TO DETOXIFY A BASILISK'S BODY.
I FOUND OUT THE SOURCE OF THE STONE.
A BASILISK MUST BECOME PREGNANT IN ORDER TO DETOXIFY THEIR BODY...
CRINKLE

I WAS UNABLE TO SAVE HER.
NO, IT'S NOT GOOD NEWS.
THIS IS GOOD NEWS. SHE COULD STILL BE ALIVE.
YOU'RE TRYING TO CONSOLE ME? IT'S UNUSUAL FOR YOU TO BE SO KIND.
AS A WOMAN, I FEEL YOU DID.
I THINK YOU EASED THE BURDEN IN HER HEART.
ARGENT, HOW ARE YOU DOING?
WERE YOU ABLE TO DISCOVER THE TRUTH ABOUT BASILISKS?
THAT "UNUSUAL" COMMENT WAS UNFAIR.
I KEEP PRAYING THAT BASILISKS LIKE YOU AND CORDA WILL BE HEALED ONE DAY.
Rp 26/ The End

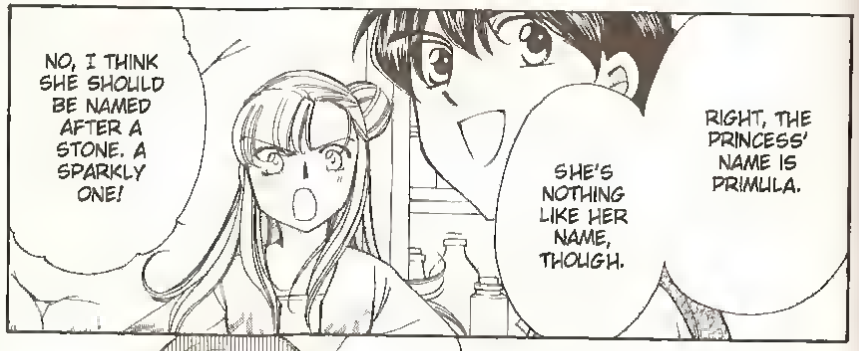
I NEED TO ASK YOU A QUESTION.
IS THERE A NEW APOTHECARY IN TOWN?
Merchant country of Castoria located on the Eastern section of the continent.
BLACK HAIR, EH? THERE'S A GUY THAT JUST STARTED WORKING FOR LULU IN MINO VALLEY.
OH, THAT GUY WE SAW RECENTLY.
MASOCHISTIC? NOT SURE ABOUT THAT.
HE'S A BLACK HAIRED, MASOCHISTIC.
Mino Valley, Lulu's Clinic.
NOLA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?
COULD YOU GIVE ME DIRECTIONS?
I ACTUALLY OWE THEM A BIG FAVOR.

Apothecarius Argentum

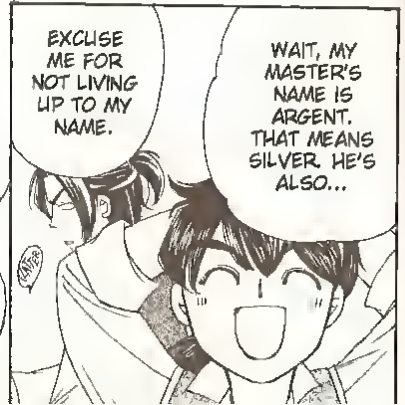

SOMEONE I KNOW WAS NAMED AFTER A FLOWER.

ARGENT...
SHE'S A GIRL, SO WHY NOT NAME HER AFTER A FLOWER?

SURE, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT TO NAME HER.
WELL, SHE NEEDS A NAME.


NO, I THINK SHE SHOULD BE NAMED AFTER A STONE. A SPARKLY ONE!
SHE'S NOTHING LIKE HER NAME, THOUGH.
RIGHT, THE PRINCESS' NAME IS PRIMULA.

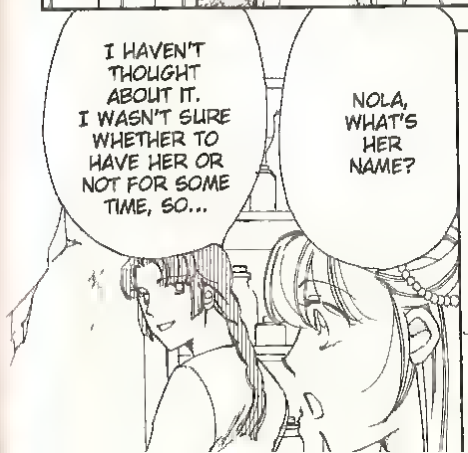
LET'S SEE.
A FAVORITE FLOWER OR STONE...


EXCUSE ME FOR NOT LIVING UP TO MY NAME.
WAIT, MY MASTER'S NAME IS ARGENT. THAT MEANS SILVER. HE'S ALSO...

WHO'S A MEAN OLD WITCH AGAIN, SODA?
LULU, THAT MEAN OLD WITCH!

LULU SAID I SHOULD START TO MOVE AROUND MORE.
I'LL CARRY THAT TRAY FOR YOU.
YOU JUST HAD SURGERY TO HAVE YOUR BABY.

UH... OH. I SEE.
I'M GIVING NOLA SOME EXERCISE FOR A REASON.
PEOPLE NEED TO MOVE AFTER THEY'VE HAD AN INCISION INTO THEIR TORSO. OTHERWISE IT CAN CAUSE ADHESION OF THEIR ORGANS.


I HAVEN'T THOUGHT ABOUT IT. I WASN'T SURE WHETHER TO HAVE HER OR NOT FOR SOME TIME, SO...
NOLA, WHAT'S HER NAME?

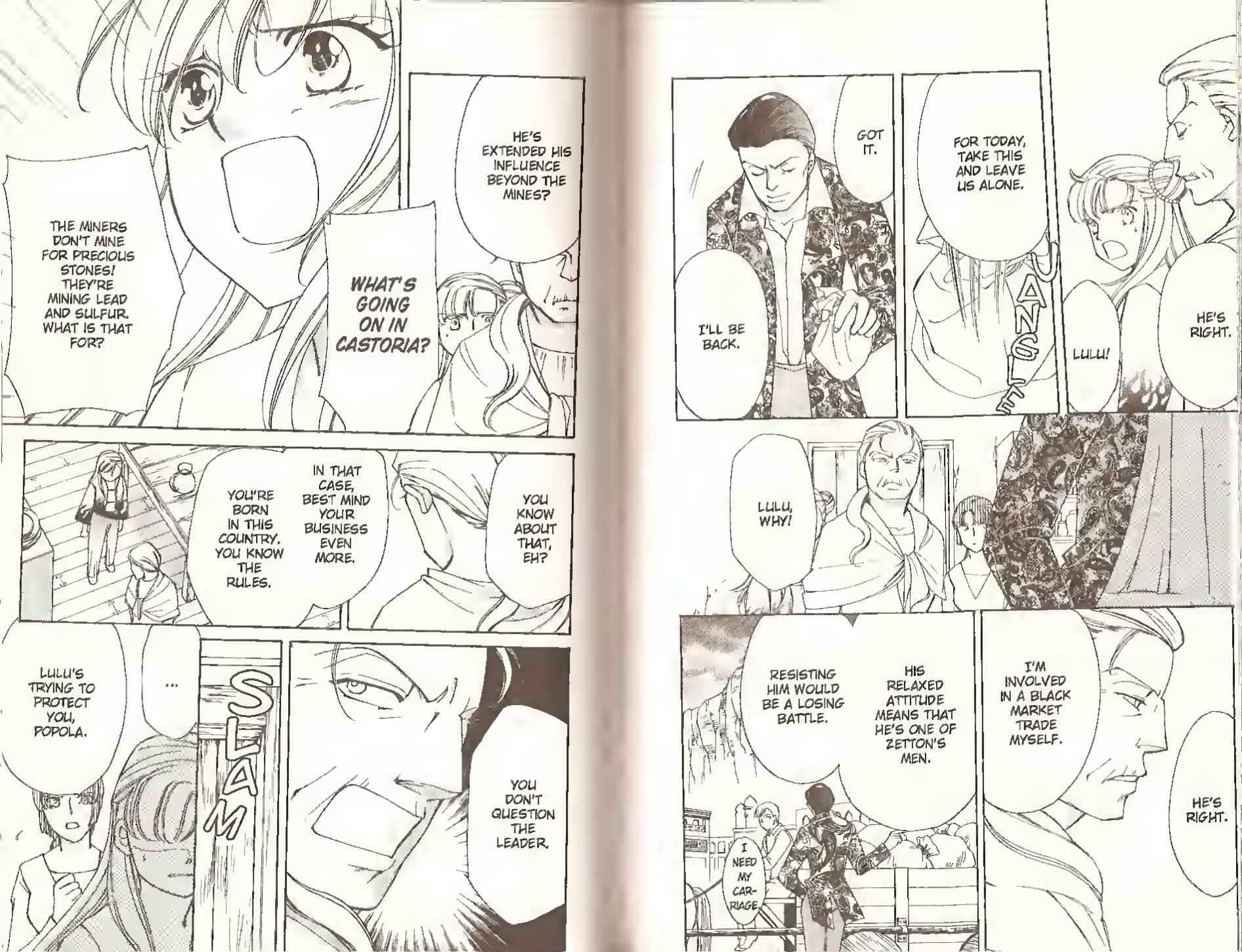
YOU'LL SEE.
YOU'RE GOING TO SHINE AND BE THE NEXT DIAMOND OF CASTORIA.

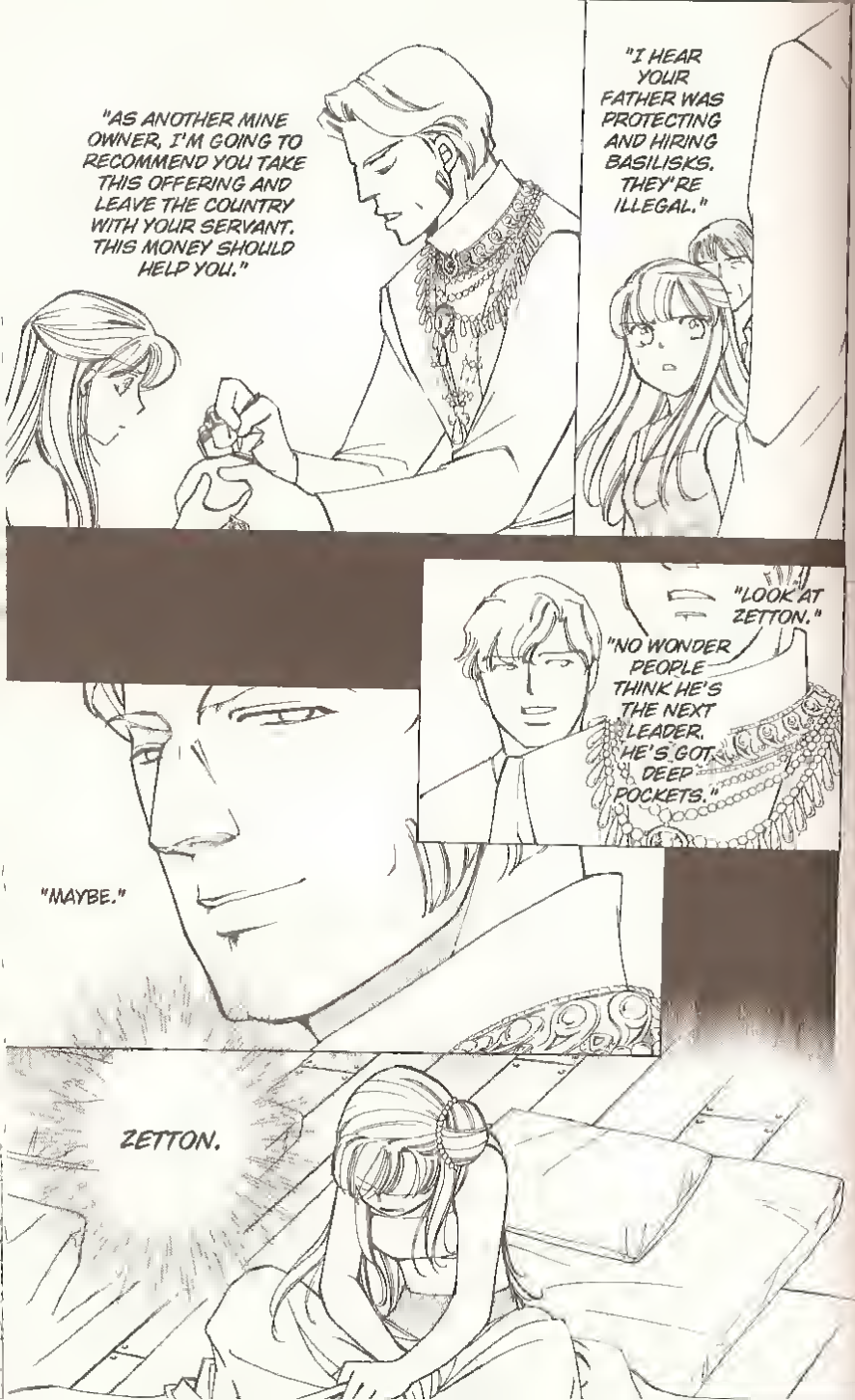
YOU'RE IN A GOOD STATE FOR FINDING OUT THE METHOD OF DETOXIFICATION. I FIGURED YOU WOULD BE MORE DEPRESSED.
I'VE DESPAIRED BEFORE, SO THAT EXPERIENCE HELPED ME THIS TIME AROUND.
I'M GOING TO TRY AND FIND SOME OTHER WAY.
HEH
YOU'VE BECOME QUITE RESILIENT.
I'VE LEARNED A FEW THINGS HERE.
I'VE LEARNED TO ROLL WITH THE PUNCHES. I'VE DEVELOPED THE WILL TO CALL THE HEAD OF A COIN A TAIL IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE MY GOALS.
HOW LONG ARE YOU PLANNING TO STAY?
YOU'VE FOUND THAT THERE'S NO STONE HERE. THERE'S NOTHING LEFT HERE FOR YOU.
I CAN'T LEAVE A PATIENT THAT STILL NEEDS CARE.
I NEED TO MAKE SURE BOTH YOU AND NOLA RECOVER.
I WANT TO LOOK AFTER MY MOTHER FIGURE.
I DON'T NEED A SON LIKE YOU!

I'M GOING TO NAME HER LULU.
WHY WOULD SHE PICK THAT?
DON'T BE STEALING OTHER PEOPLE'S NAMES NOW, GIRL.
I'M FORGETFUL, SO I WANT TO MAKE SURE I DON'T MAKE MISTAKES.
I WANT HER TO GROW UP STRONG AND RESILIENT LIKE YOU.
THAT'S GREAT, "LI'L" LULU! AW, YOU'RE SNIFFLING AGAIN.
LI'L LULU, LET UNCLE SODA CHANGE YOUR DIAPERS!
GAH, DO WHATEVER YOU WANT! I DON'T CARE!

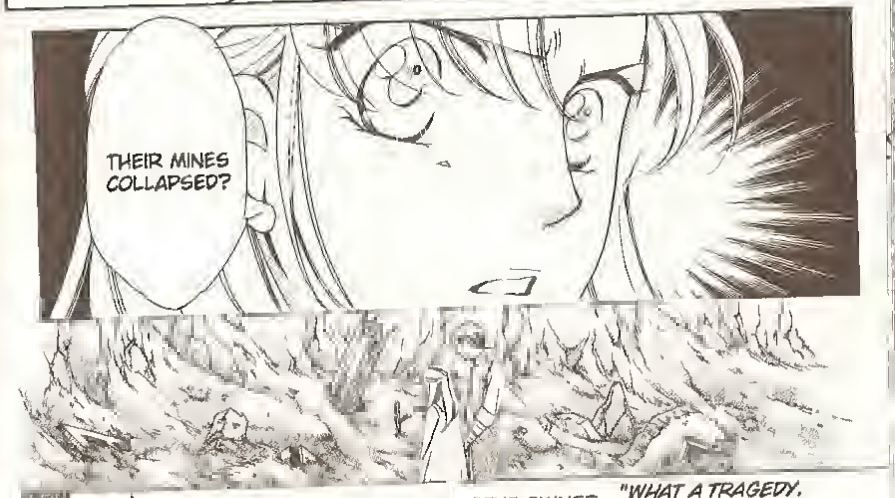
I'M SORRY TO DELAY CONTACTING YOU.
I PLAN ON WORKING AS LONG AS I NEED TO PAY OFF MY DEBTS.
DUNNO IF YOU CAN EVER PAY ME BACK.
THE PENALTY FOR DEFAULTING ON YOUR CONTRACT MEANS YOU OWE 2 MILLION LIRS.
THAT'S JUST RIDICULOUSLY INFLATED!
NOLA JUST TURNED 16! YOU WERE VIOLATING THE LAW!
NOW, YOU CAN GET A PERMIT BASED ON YOUR HEIGHT. PENALTY FOR BREACHING YOUR CONTRACT IS STANDARD NOW.
WHAT LAW ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT, ANYWAY?
YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT THE CURRENT RELAXATION OF LAWS....
IT JUST ALLOWS PEOPLE TO DO WHAT THEY WANT!
YOU HAVE NO ROOM TO TALK!

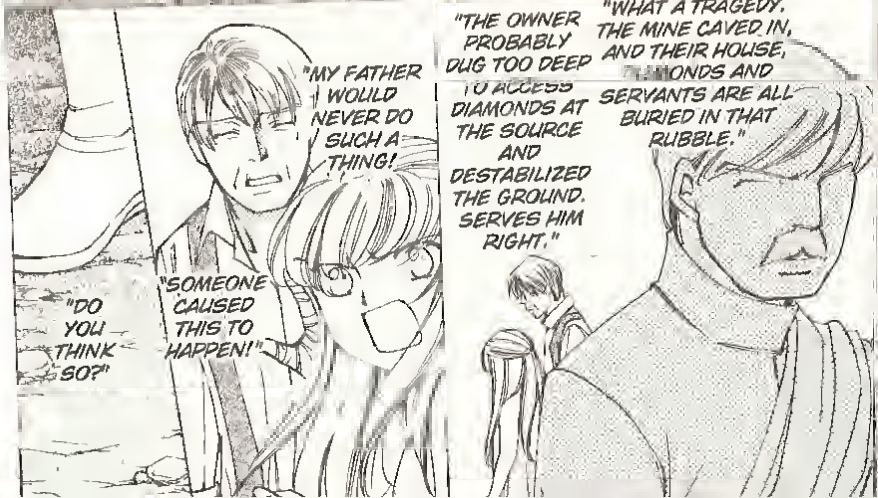
HE'S NOT DEPRESSED. HE'S MORE MOTIVATED.
JUST LET ME HANDLE THIS! LULU, YOU NEED TO REST!
I HEARD YOU WERE CARRIED TO LULU'S CLINIC.
BOSS...
INSTEAD OF ABORTING, YOU GAVE BIRTH. THAT'S GONNA BE A PROBLEM.
HERE YOU ARE, NOLA.


THE MINERS DON'T MINE FOR PRECIOUS STONES! THEY'RE MINING LEAD AND SULFUR. WHAT IS THAT FOR?
HE'S EXTENDED HIS INFLUENCE BEYOND THE MINES?
WHAT'S GOING ON IN CASTORIA?
YOU KNOW ABOUT THAT, EH?
IN THAT CASE, BEST MIND YOUR BUSINESS EVEN MORE.
YOU'RE BORN IN THIS COUNTRY. YOU KNOW THE RULES.
LULU'S TRYING TO PROTECT YOU, POPOLA.
...
SLAM
YOU DON'T QUESTION THE LEADER.
I'LL BE BACK.
GOT IT.
FOR TODAY, TAKE THIS AND LEAVE US ALONE.
JANGLE
LULU!
HE'S RIGHT.
LULU, WHY!
RESISTING HIM WOULD BE A LOSING BATTLE.
HIS RELAXED ATTITUDE MEANS THAT HE'S ONE OF ZETTON'S MEN.
I NEED MY CARRIAGE.
I'M INVOLVED IN A BLACK MARKET TRADE MYSELF.
HE'S RIGHT.


"AS ANOTHER MINE OWNER, I'M GOING TO RECOMMEND YOU TAKE THIS OFFERING AND LEAVE THE COUNTRY WITH YOUR SERVANT. THIS MONEY SHOULD HELP YOU."
"I HEAR YOUR FATHER WAS PROTECTING AND HIRING BASILISKS. THEY'RE ILLEGAL."
"LOOK AT ZETTON."
"NO WONDER PEOPLE THINK HE'S THE NEXT LEADER. HE'S GOT DEEP POCKETS."
"MAYBE."
ZETTON.

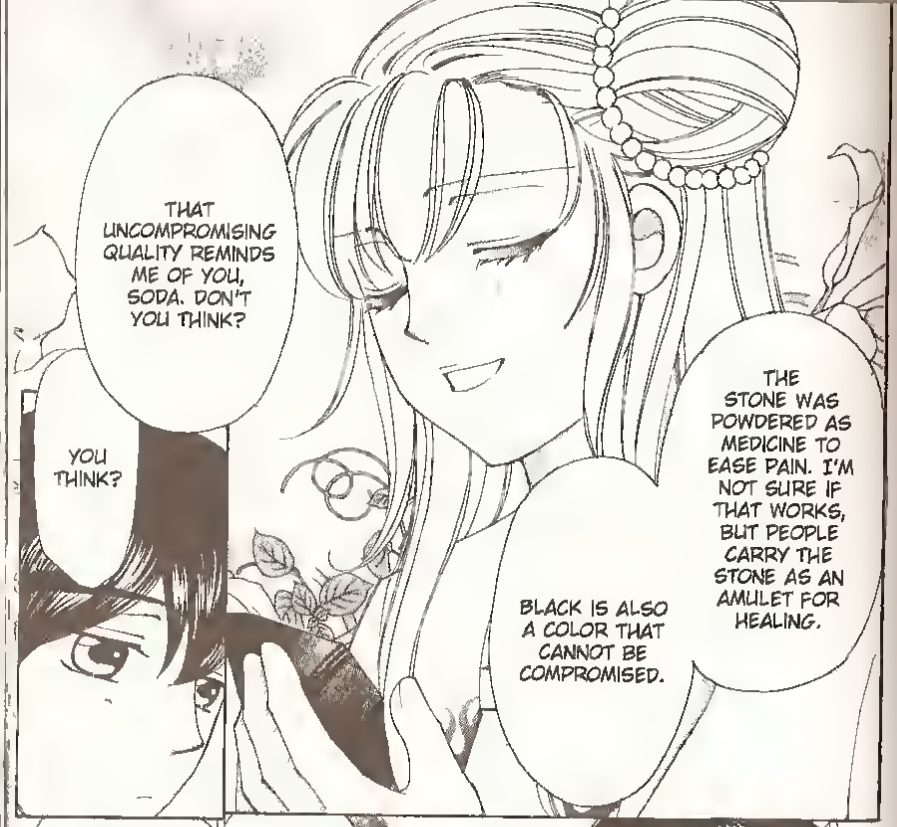
THEY ALL DIED WHEN THEIR MINES COLLAPSED. YOU UNDER-STAND?
THEY TRIED TO DISCOVER WHAT HE WAS DOING.
THERE WERE OTHERS THAT WERE CONCERNED ABOUT ZETTON'S BUSINESS.

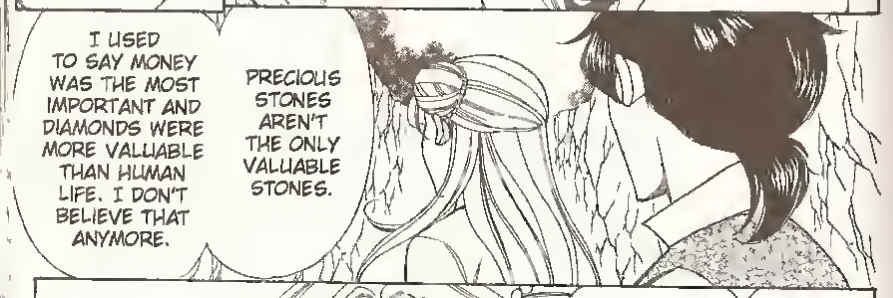

THEIR MINES COLLAPSED?


"MY FATHER WOULD NEVER DO SUCH A THING!
"SOMEONE CAUSED THIS TO HAPPEN!"
"DO YOU THINK SO?"
"THE OWNER PROBABLY DUG TOO DEEP TO ACCESS DIAMONDS AT THE SOURCE AND DESTABILIZED THE GROUND. SERVES HIM RIGHT."
"WHAT A TRAGEDY. THE MINE CAVED IN, AND THEIR HOUSE, DIAMONDS AND SERVANTS ARE ALL BURIED IN THAT RUBBLE."

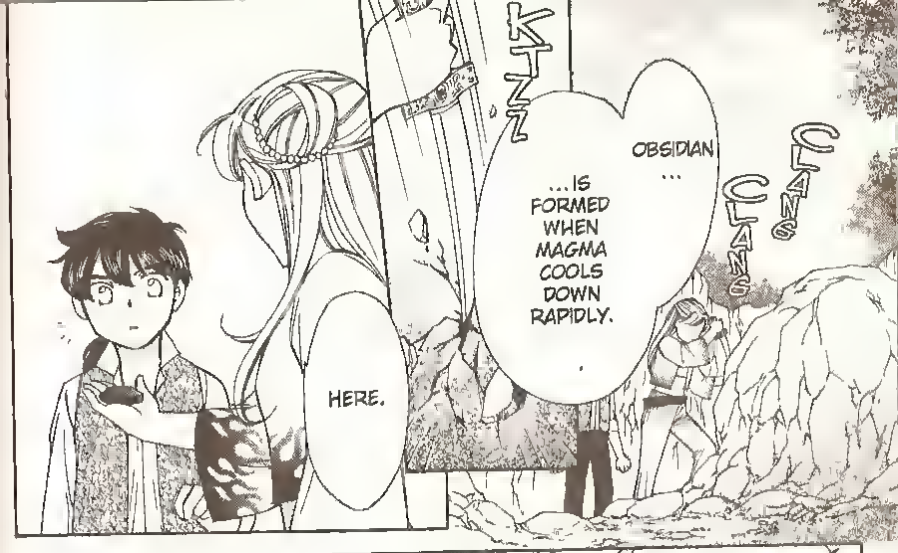
IT'S USED IN BATTLE IN SOUTHERN COUNTRIES ON THE CONTINENT.
FIREARMS WERE BROUGHT INTO PART OF NAVARA, I HEAR.
COULD ZETTON BE SUPPLYING OTHER COUNTRIES WITH MATERIALS FOR THEIR WEAPONS?
CASTORIA IS A NEUTRAL AND INDEPENDENT COUNTRY. THAT CAN'T BE...
IT SHOULDN'T BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN!
DID MY FATHER DISCOVER HIS SECRET...?
POPOLA, I HAVE TO ASK YOU SOMETHING.
WHAT'S AN OBSIDIAN?
YOU SAID I'D NEVER AMOUNT TO MUCH MORE THAN THAT BEFORE.

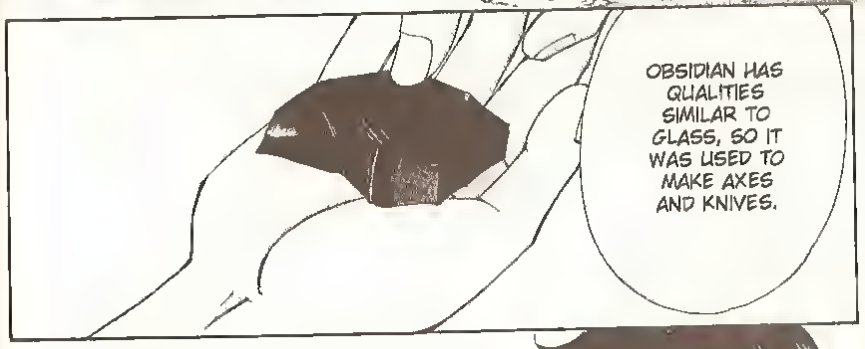
SODA, CAN I ASK YOU A QUESTION?
ARGENT SAID METALS CAN BE USED AS MEDICINE. DO LEAD AND SULFUR HAVE ANY USE AS MEDICINE?
HMMM
PEOPLE TRIED DRINKING THEM AS A FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH LONG TIME AGO.
SCRUB SCRUB SCRUB
ACTUALLY, THEY'RE MORE LIKELY TO BE USED AS INGREDIENTS TO MAKE FIREWORKS, FIREARMS AND BOMBS.
LEAD IS TOXIC WHEN TAKEN INTERNALLY. SULFUR IS USED TO TREAT SKIN BLEMISHES SINCE IT'S A DISINFECTANT.
FIRE-ARMS? WHAT'S THAT?
THE LEAD IS USED AS THE PROJECTILE BULLET. SULFUR IS USED AS THE EXPLOSIVE TO PROPEL THE BULLET.
IT'S LIGHTWEIGHT AND PORTABLE, AND IT CAN KILL PEOPLE FROM FAR AWAY.
IT'S LIKE A MINIATURE CANNON OF SORTS.


THAT UNCOMPROMISING QUALITY REMINDS ME OF YOU, SODA. DON'T YOU THINK?
YOU THINK?
THE STONE WAS POWDERED AS MEDICINE TO EASE PAIN. I'M NOT SURE IF THAT WORKS, BUT PEOPLE CARRY THE STONE AS AN AMULET FOR HEALING.
BLACK IS ALSO A COLOR THAT CANNOT BE COMPROMISED.


I USED TO SAY MONEY WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT AND DIAMONDS WERE MORE VALUABLE THAN HUMAN LIFE. I DON'T BELIEVE THAT ANYMORE.
PRECIOUS STONES AREN'T THE ONLY VALUABLE STONES.

ONE IS AN OLD CRONE, ANOTHER JUST A BABY, BUT THEIR HEARTS HOLD THE MOST PRECIOUS JEWEL.
TO ME, BOTH LULUS SHINE BRIGHT.


HERE.
OBSIDIAN ...
...IS FORMED WHEN MAGMA COOLS DOWN RAPIDLY.
CLAZG CLAZG
KLNZ


OBSIDIAN HAS QUALITIES SIMILAR TO GLASS, SO IT WAS USED TO MAKE AXES AND KNIVES.

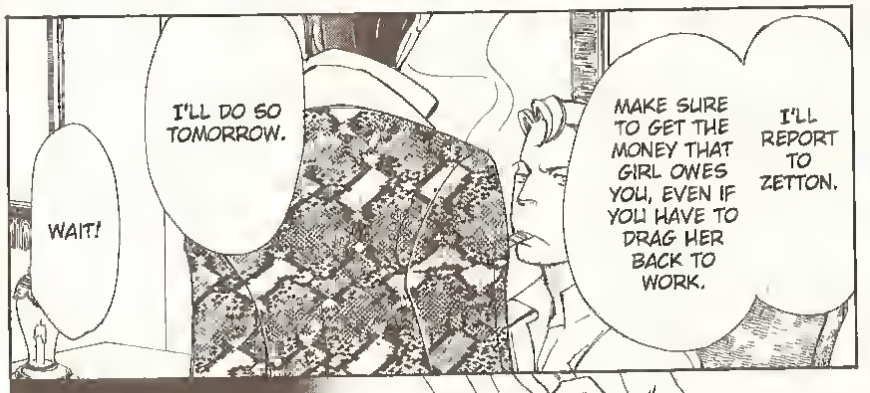
ONCE IT'S POLISHED, IT SHINES LIKE A MIRROR. IT'S CALLED BLACK VELVET AND THE STONE THAT REFLECTS THE TRUTH.
THAT'S NOT TRUE!

IT'S NEITHER PRETTY NOR WORTH A LOT OF MONEY.
I SEE.

THANK YOU! ♡
WITH MY SPARKING BEAUTY, I WAS PLANNING TO SET OFF A DISTANCE TO PROMOTE MY FOOT BATH BUSINESS.
STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT!
IT'S A BRILLIANT SPARKLE!
OH, THAT'S WHAT SHE WANTED TO KNOW...
I'M GOING TO LEAVE YOU TO TAKE CARE OF BOTH LULUS.
I DON'T UNDER-STAND WOMEN.
PLEASE TAKE CARE! LATER...
THE BABY LULU'S JEWEL IS PRETTY BECAUSE IT HASN'T BEEN TARNISHED BY LIFE JUST YET.
THE OLD LULU'S JEWEL WAS POLISHED FROM LIFE EXPERIENCE.
WHA--?
WHAT ABOUT ME?
RIGHT.
I- I- I...
IS SHE COMING ONTO ME?
O-- OF COURSE!
I HAVE TO STEP UP!
CAN'T BE LIKE MY MASTER!
IS THE JEWEL IN MY HEART STILL SPARKLING AND CLEAR?

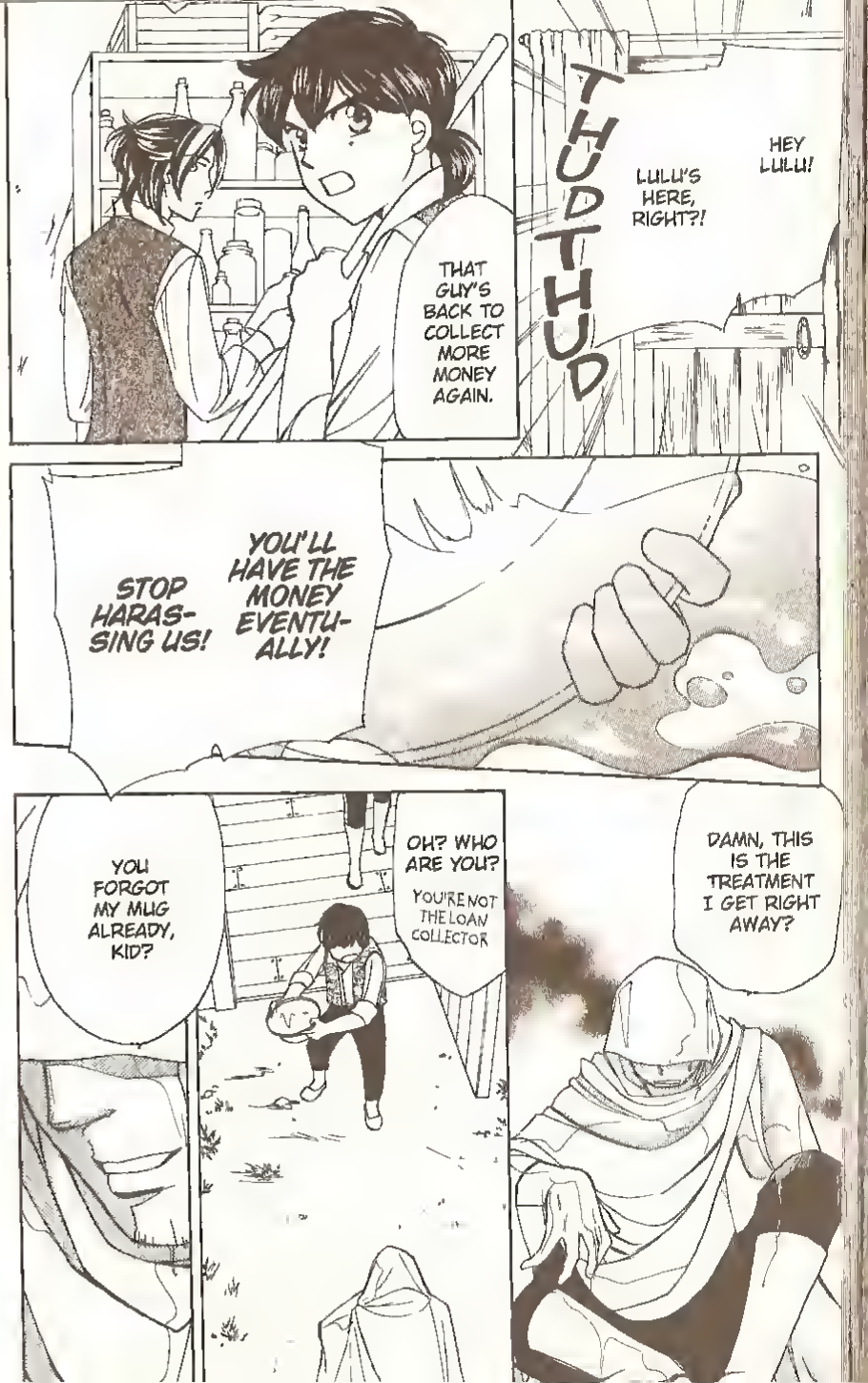
YOU TRIED TO HIRE ME ON THE STREET-CORNER THE OTHER DAY.
YOU SAID YOU COULD MAKE ME NUMBER ONE. WERE YOU LYING?
I WAS...
YOU SAID WHAT?!
CRAP!
...
I'M THE NUMBER ONE HERE. YOU'VE GOT SOME NERVE!
THUD THUD

THAT'S THE SITUATION, BOSS. I'M SORRY.
ONE OF MY GIRLS GOT PREGNANT AND HAD THAT KID.
HAD THE BABY, EH?

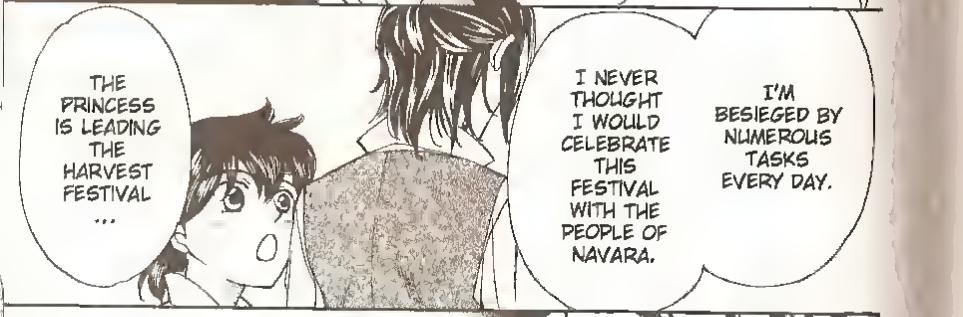

I'LL REPORT TO ZETTON.
MAKE SURE TO GET THE MONEY THAT GIRL OWES YOU, EVEN IF YOU HAVE TO DRAG HER BACK TO WORK.
I'LL DO SO TOMORROW.
WAIT!

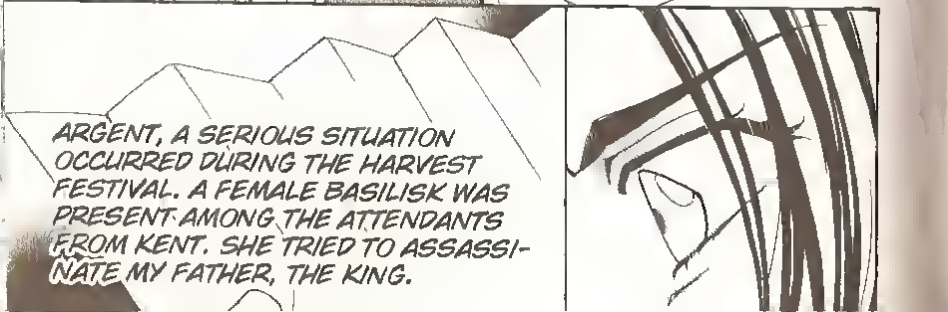
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I'M HERE TO PAY FOR NOLA'S DEBT.
I'M GOING TO WORK IN HER PLACE INSTEAD.

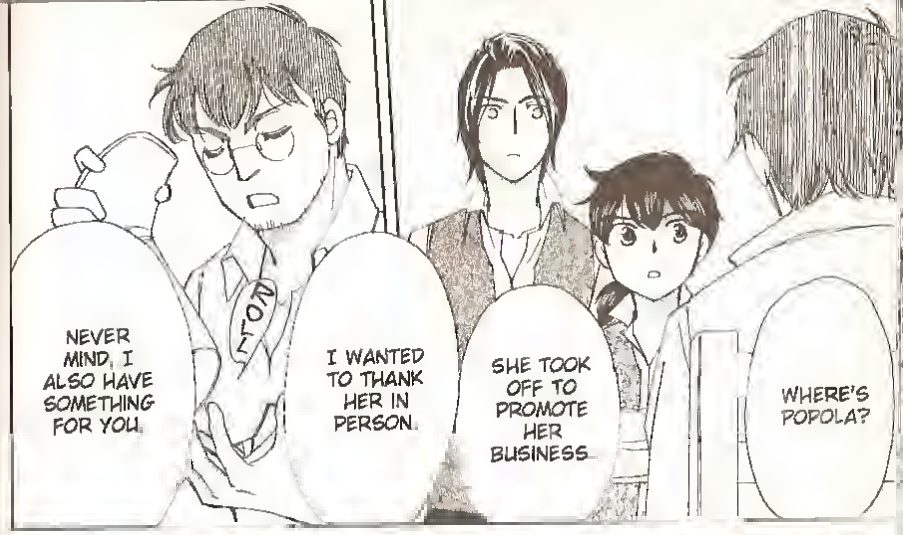
YOU'RE THE LOSERS SQUATTING NEAR THE BORDER!
THAT'S REALLY COLD, MR. APOTH-ECARY AND HIS ASSIS-TANT!
WADAH-
NOW, I'M THE KING OF HOTELS. I WAS FINALLY GIVEN PERMISSION TO ENTER THE COUNTRY. JADE SAID YOU WERE IN MINO VALLEY, SO I DECIDED TO DROP BY.
I STARTED A CASINO AS RECREATION FOR THE CUSTOMERS. IT WAS A HUGE HIT.
PEOPLE THAT COME TO CASTORIA ARE GAMBLERS.
MY LODGE DECIDED TO LINK UP WITH POPOLA'S HOT SPRINGS. WE'VE HAD AN INFLUX OF CUSTOMERS.

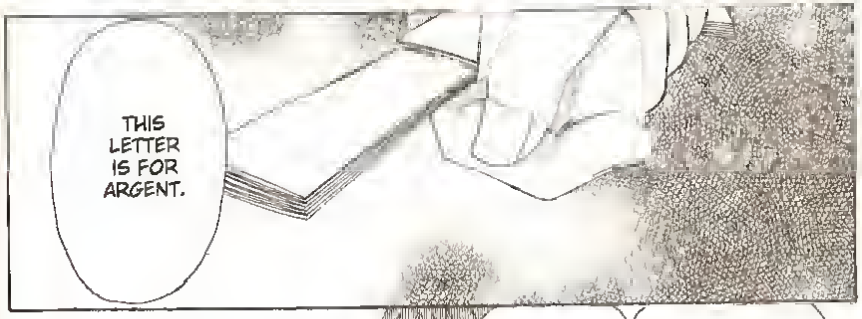

THAT GUY'S BACK TO COLLECT MORE MONEY AGAIN.
THUD THUD
LULU'S HERE, RIGHT?!
HEY LULU!
STOP HARAS-SING US!
YOU'LL HAVE THE MONEY EVENTU-ALLY!
YOU FORGOT MY MUG ALREADY, KID?
OH? WHO ARE YOU?
YOU'RE NOT THE LOAN COLLECTOR
DAMN, THIS IS THE TREATMENT I GET RIGHT AWAY?

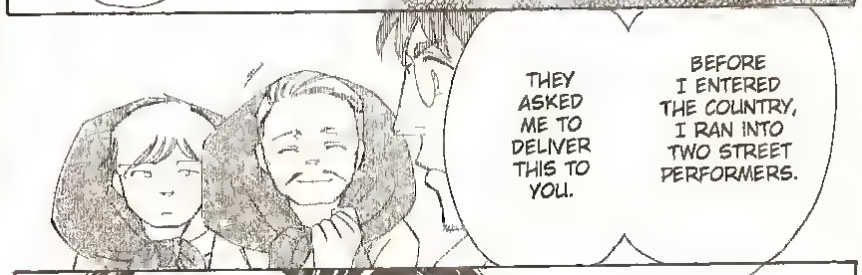
I RECEIVED YOUR LETTER FROM TWO TRAVELING PERFORMERS NAMED LACK AND BEAN.
I'M GLAD YOU ARE CONTINUING YOUR SEARCH IN CASTORIA.
IT'S ALMOST TIME FOR ANOTHER HARVEST FESTIVAL.
DEAR ARGENT IN CASTORIA, THIS IS A LETTER FROM LADY PRIMULA IN BEAZOL.

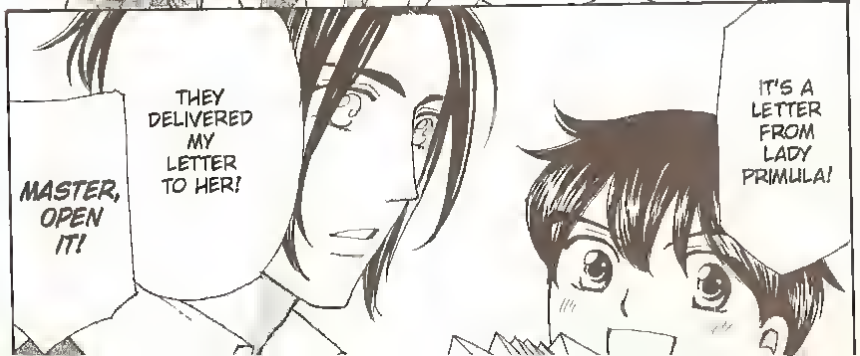

THE PRINCESS IS LEADING THE HARVEST FESTIVAL ...
I NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD CELEBRATE THIS FESTIVAL WITH THE PEOPLE OF NAVARA.
I'M BESIEGED BY NUMEROUS TASKS EVERY DAY.

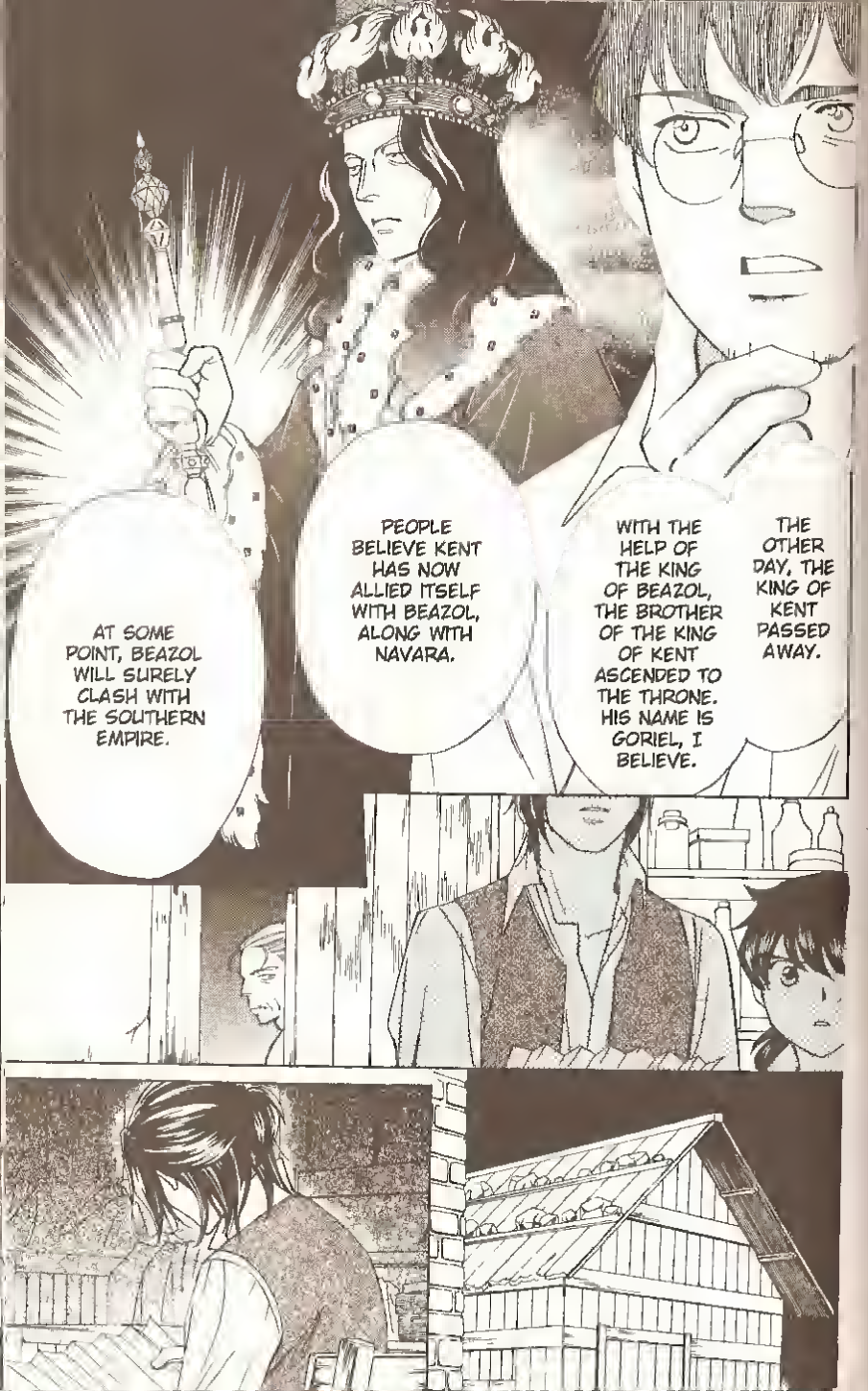

ARGENT, A SERIOUS SITUATION OCCURRED DURING THE HARVEST FESTIVAL. A FEMALE BASILISK WAS PRESENT AMONG THE ATTENDANTS FROM KENT. SHE TRIED TO ASSASSINATE MY FATHER, THE KING.

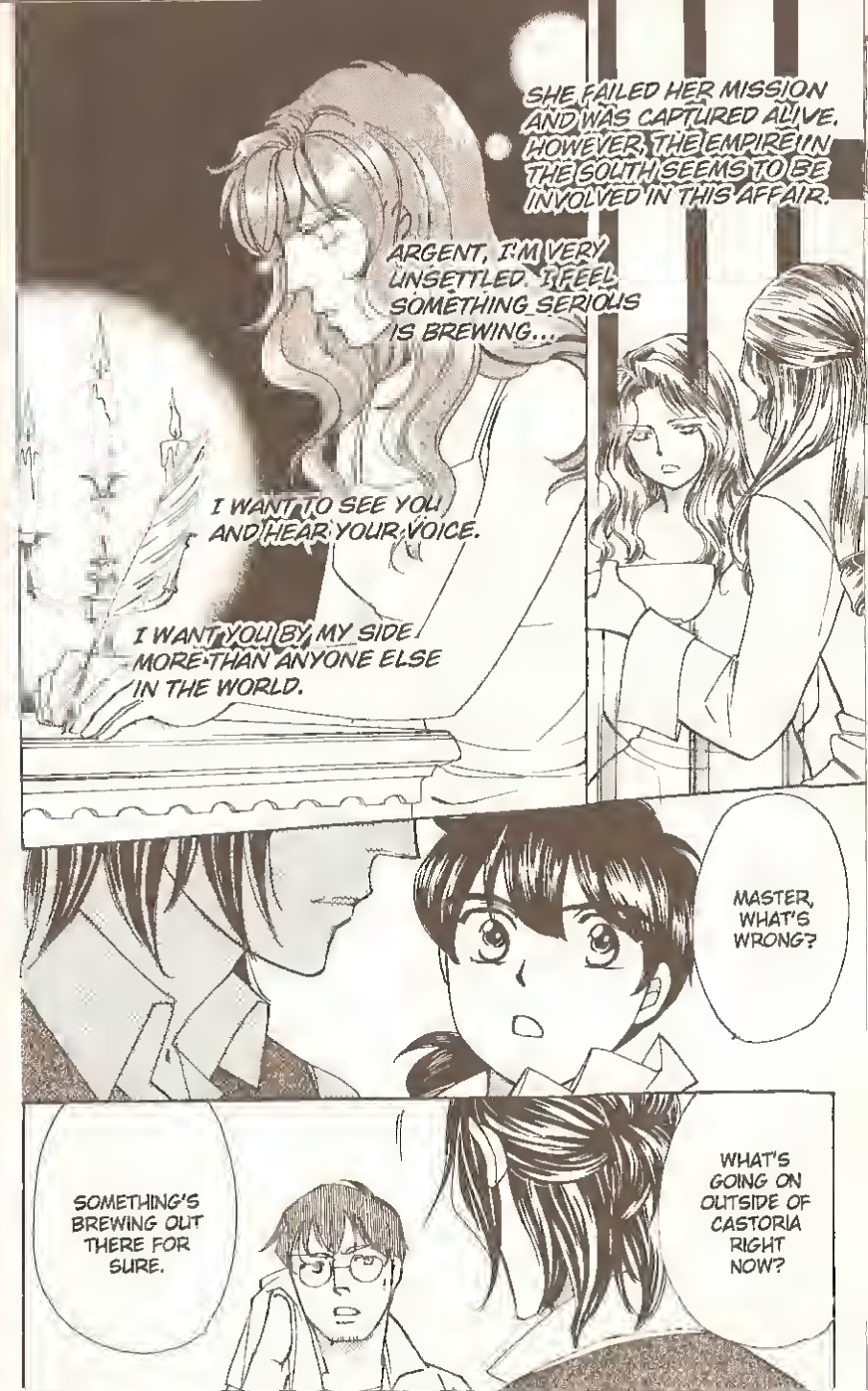

NEVER MIND, I ALSO HAVE SOMETHING FOR YOU.
I WANTED TO THANK HER IN PERSON.
SHE TOOK OFF TO PROMOTE HER BUSINESS.
WHERE'S POPOLA?


THIS LETTER IS FOR ARGENT.

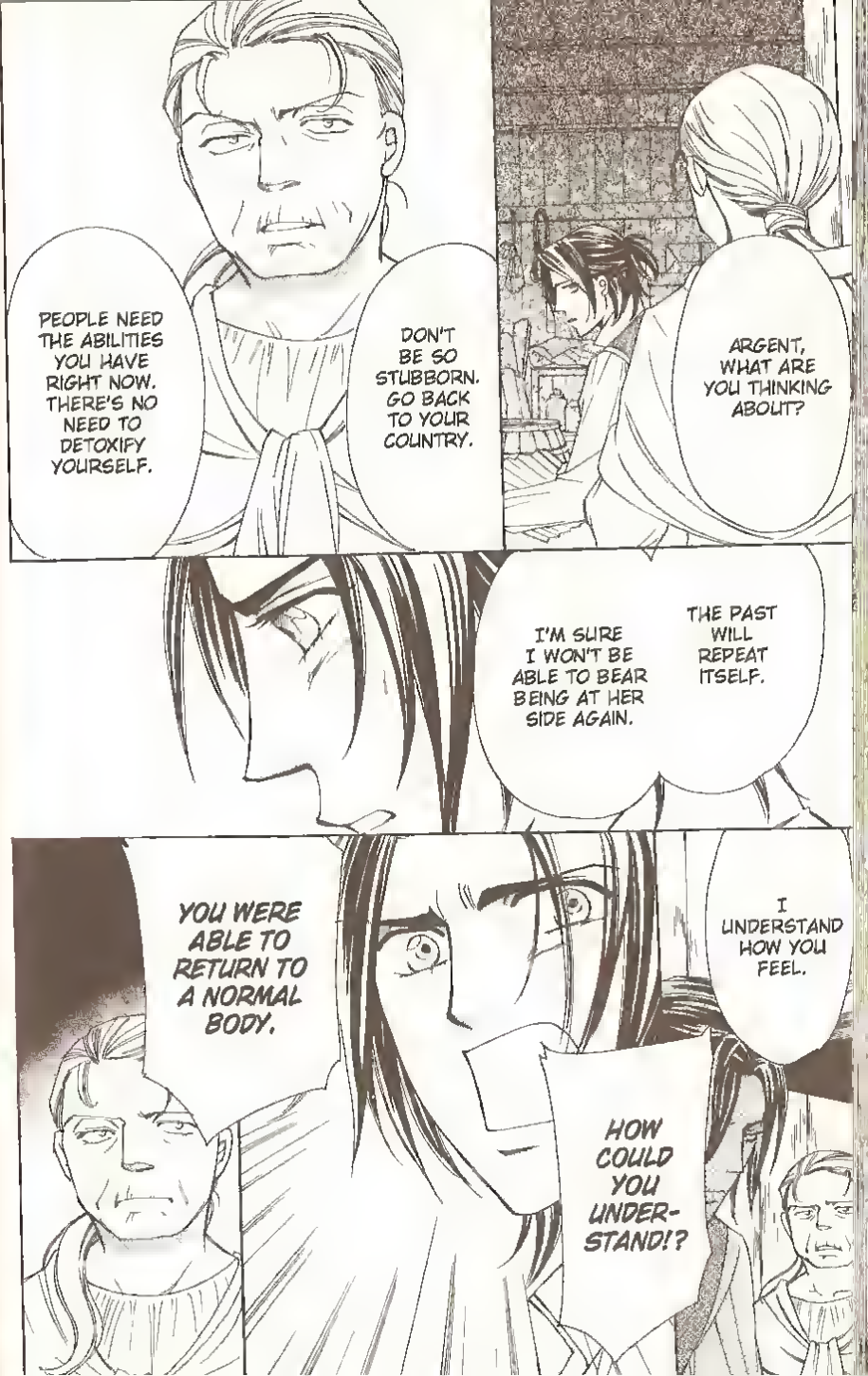

THEY ASKED ME TO DELIVER THIS TO YOU.
BEFORE I ENTERED THE COUNTRY, I RAN INTO TWO STREET PERFORMERS.


MASTER, OPEN IT!
THEY DELIVERED MY LETTER TO HER!
IT'S A LETTER FROM LADY PRIMULA!

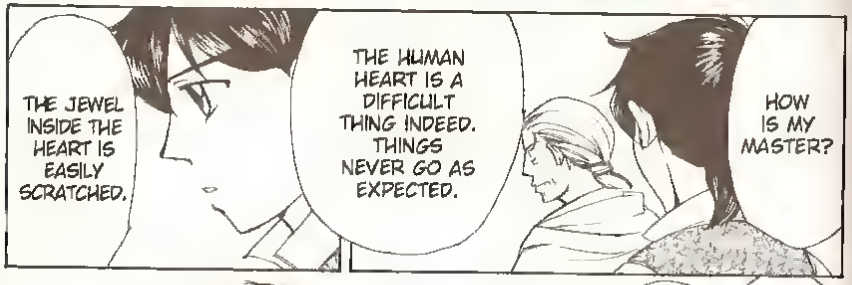

AT SOME POINT, BEAZOL WILL SURELY CLASH WITH THE SOUTHERN EMPIRE.
PEOPLE BELIEVE KENT HAS NOW ALLIED ITSELF WITH BEAZOL, ALONG WITH NAVARA.
WITH THE HELP OF THE KING OF BEAZOL, THE BROTHER OF THE KING OF KENT ASCENDED TO THE THRONE. HIS NAME IS GORIEL, I BELIEVE.
THE OTHER DAY, THE KING OF KENT PASSED AWAY.


SHE FAILED HER MISSION AND WAS CAPTURED ALIVE. HOWEVER, THE EMPIRE IN THE SOUTH SEEMS TO BE INVOLVED IN THIS AFFAIR.
ARGENT, I'M VERY UNSETTLED. I FEEL SOMETHING SERIOUS IS BREWING...
I WANT TO SEE YOU AND HEAR YOUR VOICE.
I WANT YOU BY MY SIDE MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE IN THE WORLD.
MASTER, WHAT'S WRONG?
SOMETHING'S BREWING OUT THERE FOR SURE.
WHAT'S GOING ON OUTSIDE OF CASTORIA RIGHT NOW?

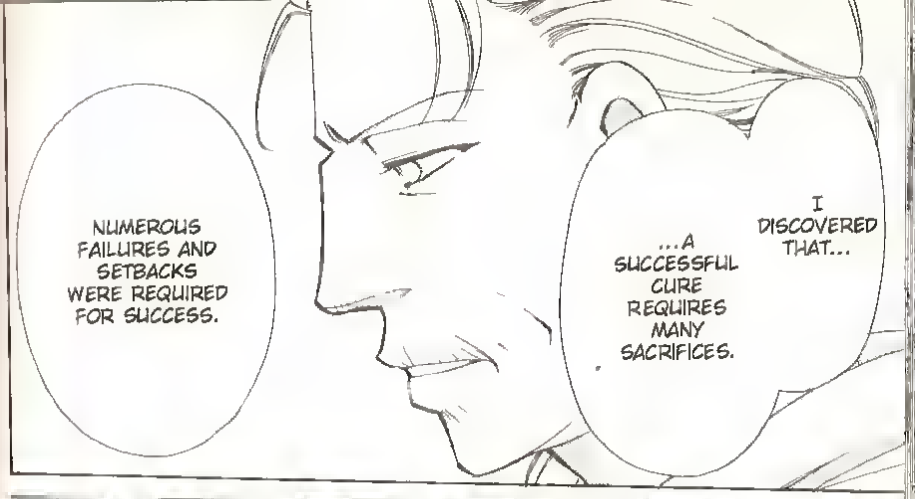
I DESERVE IT. AFTER ALL, I MANIPULATED YOU AND GAVE YOU FALSE HOPE THE LAST FEW MONTHS.
I'M SORRY, I DON'T MEAN TO LASH OUT AT YOU.
YOU'RE RIGHT.
HOWEVER, I WASN'T ABLE TO GIVE UP FOR A WHILE.
MY BODY DID DETOXIFY AND I ESCAPED THE BASILISK HUNT.
I WAS IN A RED LIGHT DISTRICT, SO THERE WERE INTERESTING PATIENTS. I WOULD PROVIDE UNUSUAL TREATMENTS, AND EVENTUALLY I WAS KNOWN AS LULU THE DOCTOR.
EVENTUALLY, PATIENTS STARTED TO STREAM IN.
I WOULD DIG UP BODIES OF EXECUTED BASILISKS AND DISSECT THEM. THAT'S WHERE THOSE STONES CAME FROM.
I WANTED TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO MY BODY, WHAT THE EXISTENCE OF BASILISKS WERE ALL ABOUT. I STUDIED AS MUCH AS I COULD.


PEOPLE NEED THE ABILITIES YOU HAVE RIGHT NOW. THERE'S NO NEED TO DETOXIFY YOURSELF.
DON'T BE SO STUBBORN. GO BACK TO YOUR COUNTRY.
ARGENT, WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?
I'M SURE I WON'T BE ABLE TO BEAR BEING AT HER SIDE AGAIN.
THE PAST WILL REPEAT ITSELF.
YOU WERE ABLE TO RETURN TO A NORMAL BODY.
HOW COULD YOU UNDER-STAND!?
I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL.

I FINISHED TALKING TO ARGENT.
LULU? WHAT? WHY?
SODA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
MATERNAL INSTINCT CAN BE BITTERSWEET...


THE JEWEL INSIDE THE HEART IS EASILY SCRATCHED.
THE HUMAN HEART IS A DIFFICULT THING INDEED. THINGS NEVER GO AS EXPECTED.
HOW IS MY MASTER?

JUST LIKE THIS STONE, AGE AND EXPERIENCE IS REQUIRED IN ORDER FOR PEOPLE TO POLISH THEMSELVES.
IT'S UP TO THE PERSON TO ENLARGE, SHINE, CLOUD OR BREAK THE JEWEL WITHIN THEM.
INSIDE THE HUMAN HEART, NOT JUST IN THE GROUND.
POPOLA SAID THAT THERE ARE JEWELS ... ...


NUMEROUS FAILURES AND SETBACKS WERE REQUIRED FOR SUCCESS.
...A SUCCESSFUL CURE REQUIRES MANY SACRIFICES.
I DISCOVERED THAT...

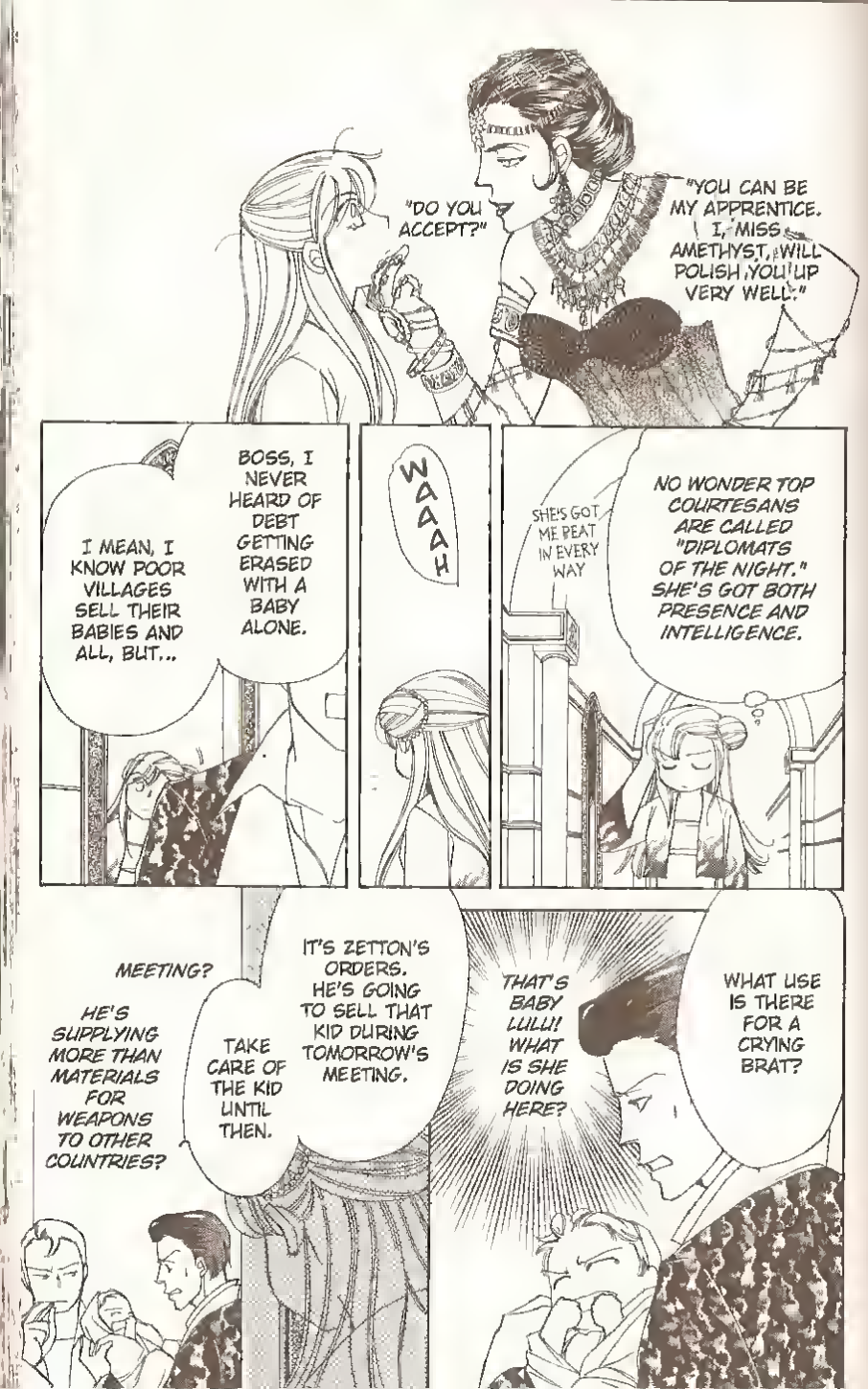
ARGENT, I DON'T WANT YOU TO SACRIFICE YOURSELF.
PLEASE UNDERSTAND. I'M SPEAKING TO YOU AS A MOTHER FIGURE.

STONES ARE POLISHED WITH HARDER STONES.
PEOPLE ARE THE SAME WAY. PEOPLE POLISH EACH OTHER.
IT'S ALL ABOUT POLISHING, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE.
YOU YOUNG ONES ARE JUST LIKE THIS STONE.
DON'T BE AFRAID TO OPEN YOURSELF TO OTHERS. FACE CHALLENGES. BECOMING A BIT WORN AT THE EDGES CAN BE A GOOD THING.
A LITTLE ROUGH POLISHING MEANS THERE'S ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.

WERE YOU EAVESDROPPING ON MY CONVERSATION?
UH
YOU DID HAVE A DIFFICULT PAST.
MY HISTORY AS A BASILISK IS IN THE PAST.
IN MY CASE, MY JEWEL WAS WORN DOWN, NOT POLISHED.
...JUST LIKE POPOLA SAYS, THE ABILITY FOR THE JEWEL TO CLOUD OR SCRATCH MEANS THERE'S STILL POSSIBILITY FOR CHANGE.
HOWEVER ...
SODA, LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING.
LULU?

THANK YOU, LULU.
YES, I WILL.
LULU! LULU!
YOU'RE A BUNCH OF TROUBLE-SOME BOYS.
...TOOK BABY LULU!! THEY KIDNAPPED HER!
MY BOSS BURST IN AND...
WHAT'S WRONG, NOLA?

I COULDN'T GIVE YOU THE STONE YOU WANTED, BUT I CAN GIVE YOU THIS.
I'M NOT GOING TO PRETEND TO BE YOUR PROTECTOR.
ARGENT, I'M COMING IN.
LULU.
YOU CAN CONTINUE MY RESEARCH.
THIS MAY HELP YOU IN YOUR QUEST FOR A NORMAL HUMAN LIFE.
THIS IS ALL THE DATA I HAVE ABOUT BASILISKS.
FIRST, RETURN TO YOUR COUNTRY.


"DO YOU ACCEPT?"
"YOU CAN BE MY APPRENTICE. I, MISS AMETHYST, WILL POLISH YOU UP VERY WELL."
BOSS, I NEVER HEARD OF DEBT GETTING ERASED WITH A BABY ALONE.
I MEAN, I KNOW POOR VILLAGES SELL THEIR BABIES AND ALL, BUT...
WAAAH
SHE'S GOT ME BEAT IN EVERY WAY
NO WONDER TOP COURTESANS ARE CALLED "DIPLOMATS OF THE NIGHT." SHE'S GOT BOTH PRESENCE AND INTELLIGENCE.
MEETING?
HE'S SUPPLYING MORE THAN MATERIALS FOR WEAPONS TO OTHER COUNTRIES?
TAKE CARE OF THE KID UNTIL THEN.
IT'S ZETTON'S ORDERS. HE'S GOING TO SELL THAT KID DURING TOMORROW'S MEETING.
THAT'S BABY LULU! WHAT IS SHE DOING HERE?
WHAT USE IS THERE FOR A CRYING BRAT?

THUD!!
NOT THIS SCORE! THE OTHER ONE!
SHE'S THE ONE THAT BARGED IN CLAIMING TO BE THE NEXT NUMBER ONE. WHAT NERVE!
YES, MISS AMETHYST! RIGHT AWAY!
...MY LITTLE APPRENTICE.
I HAVE TO MEMORIZE THIS FOR TOMORROW'S ENGAGEMENT. BRING THE RIGHT SCORE...
"A COURTESAN CANNOT ENTERTAIN A VIP WITH HER BEAUTY AND BODY ALONE, YOU KNOW."
"CAN YOU SING? DANCE? HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK?"
"THE NEXT NUMBER ONE? YOU'VE GOT SOME NERVE."

THIS ISN'T CHILD'S PLAY, YOU KNOW.
I CAN'T TAKE AN ASSISTANT THAT DOESN'T HAVE ANY SKILLS YET.
I DO, I HAVE SKILLS!
I'M GOING TO PERFORM MY SPECIAL SKILL TO EASE YOUR PHYSICAL BURDEN, LADIES!
?
CLICK
NOT TOO LONG AGO, IT WASN'T UNUSUAL FOR PEOPLE TO SELL BABIES.
WHAT WOULD THEY WANT WITH A BABY?
WE'LL GET HER BACK, SO DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID.
DON'T WORRY. IF THEY TOOK HER IN EXCHANGE FOR YOUR LOAN, THEY'LL TAKE CARE OF HER.

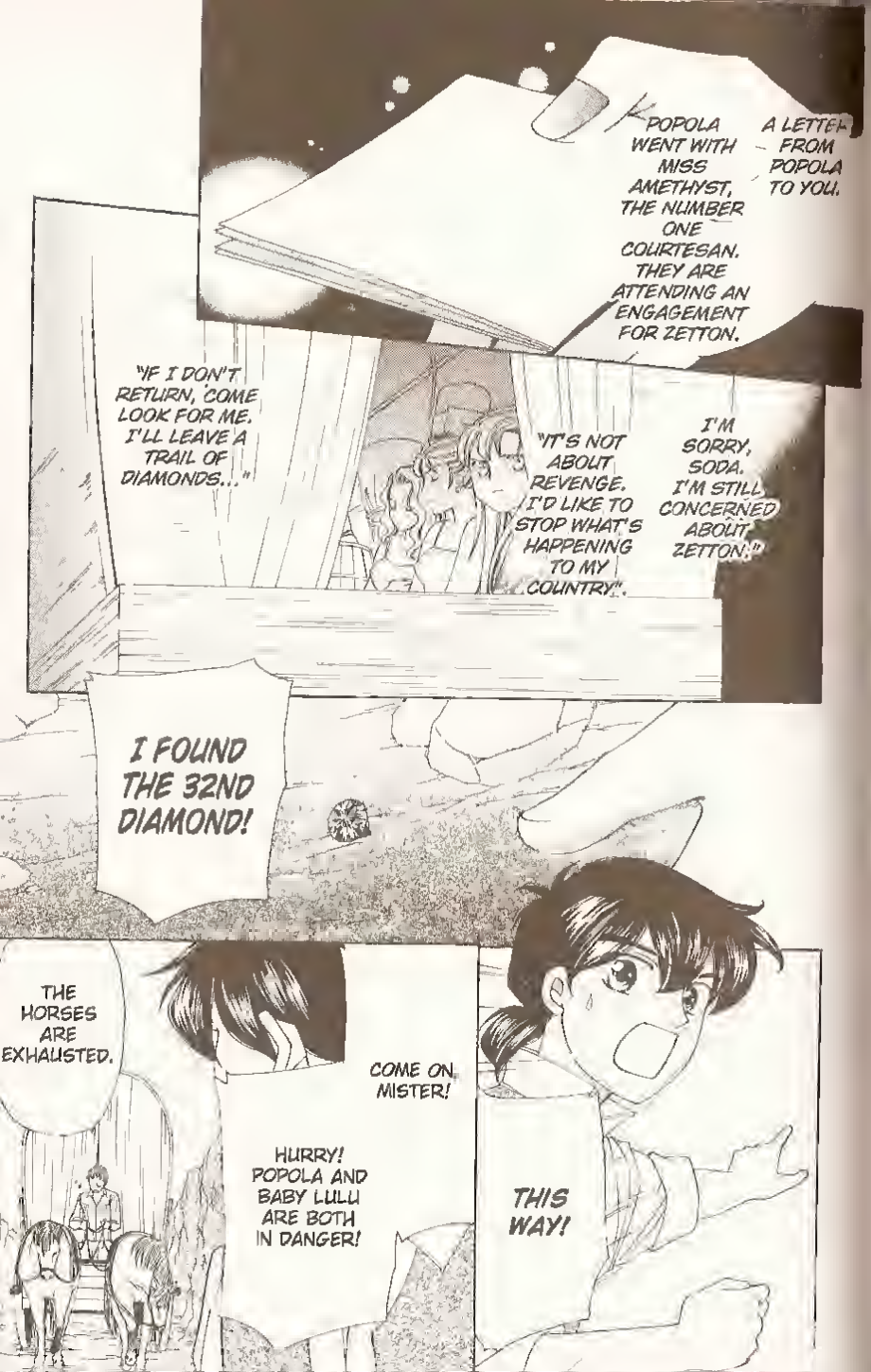
THERE, THERE
NOTHING, MISS. I JUST GOT LOST.
POPOLA, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? WE NEED TO LEAVE SOON.
COME ALONG.
I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH HIS TONGUE.
I KNOW ENTERTAINING ZETTON IS AN HONOR, BUT I HATE HIS WINE.
I'M NOT THRILLED ABOUT THIS ENGAGEMENT.
PLEASE, WILL YOU TAKE ME?
THERE'S GOING TO BE AN IMPORTANT MEETING AT HIS SECRET MANSION.
THAT'S RIGHT.
TOMORROW'S ENGAGEMENT IS FOR ZETTON?

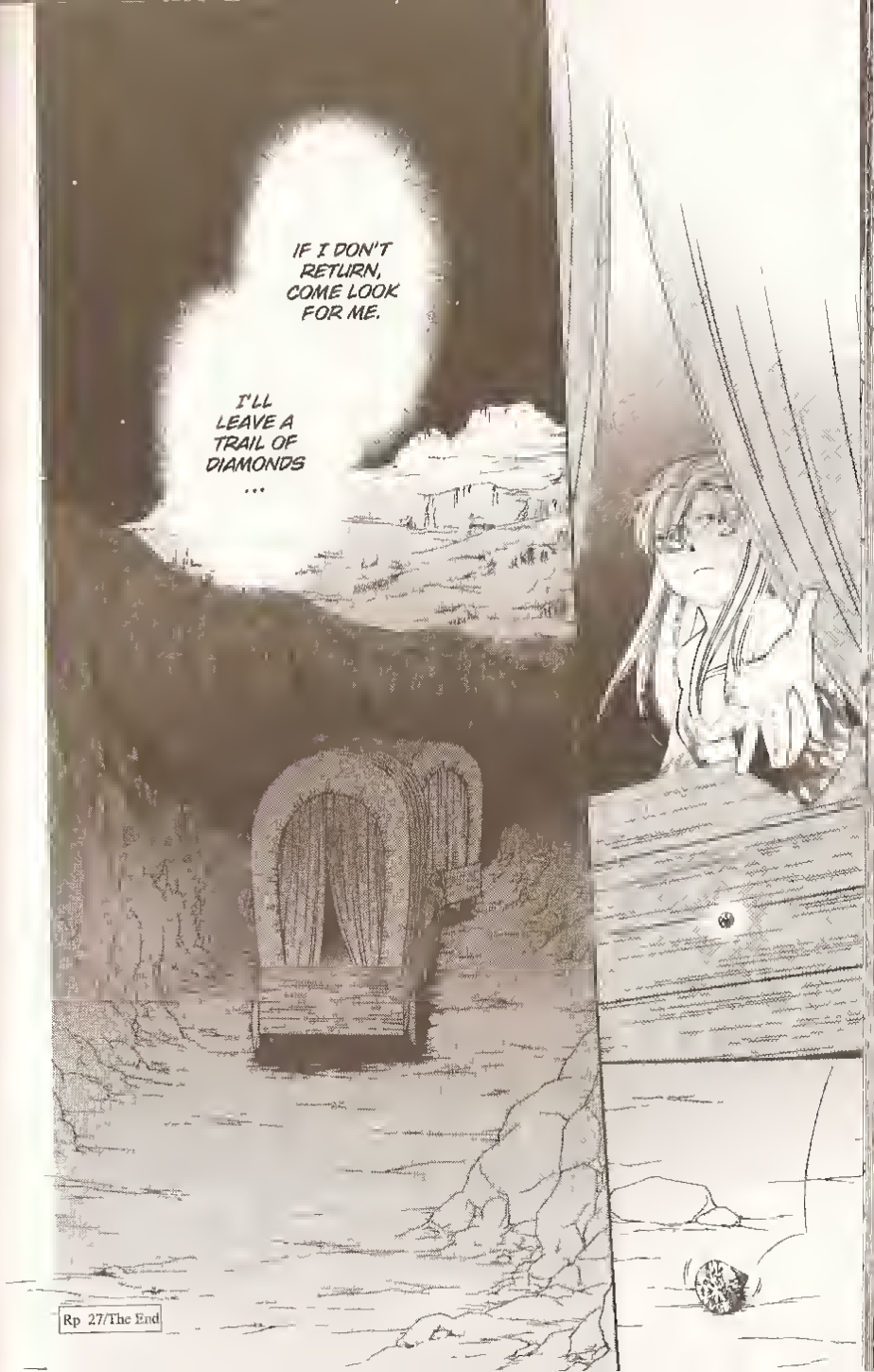
MAYBE CASTORIA HAS SOME KIND OF DEALINGS WITH THEM.
I HEARD THAT THEIR LOCATION AND IDENTITY REMAINS A MYSTERY.
IF WE CAN FOLLOW ZETTON'S FOOTSTEPS, MAYBE WE CAN DISCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND CADECALIS!
THUD THUD
GOOD EVENING! I'M LOOKING FOR A BOY NAMED SODA!

CADECALIS.
THE ONLY PEOPLE THAT I COULD THINK OF THAT WOULD TAKE INTEREST...
THAT MEANS...
THEY'RE THE EVIL ORGANIZATION THAT RAISES BASILISKS.

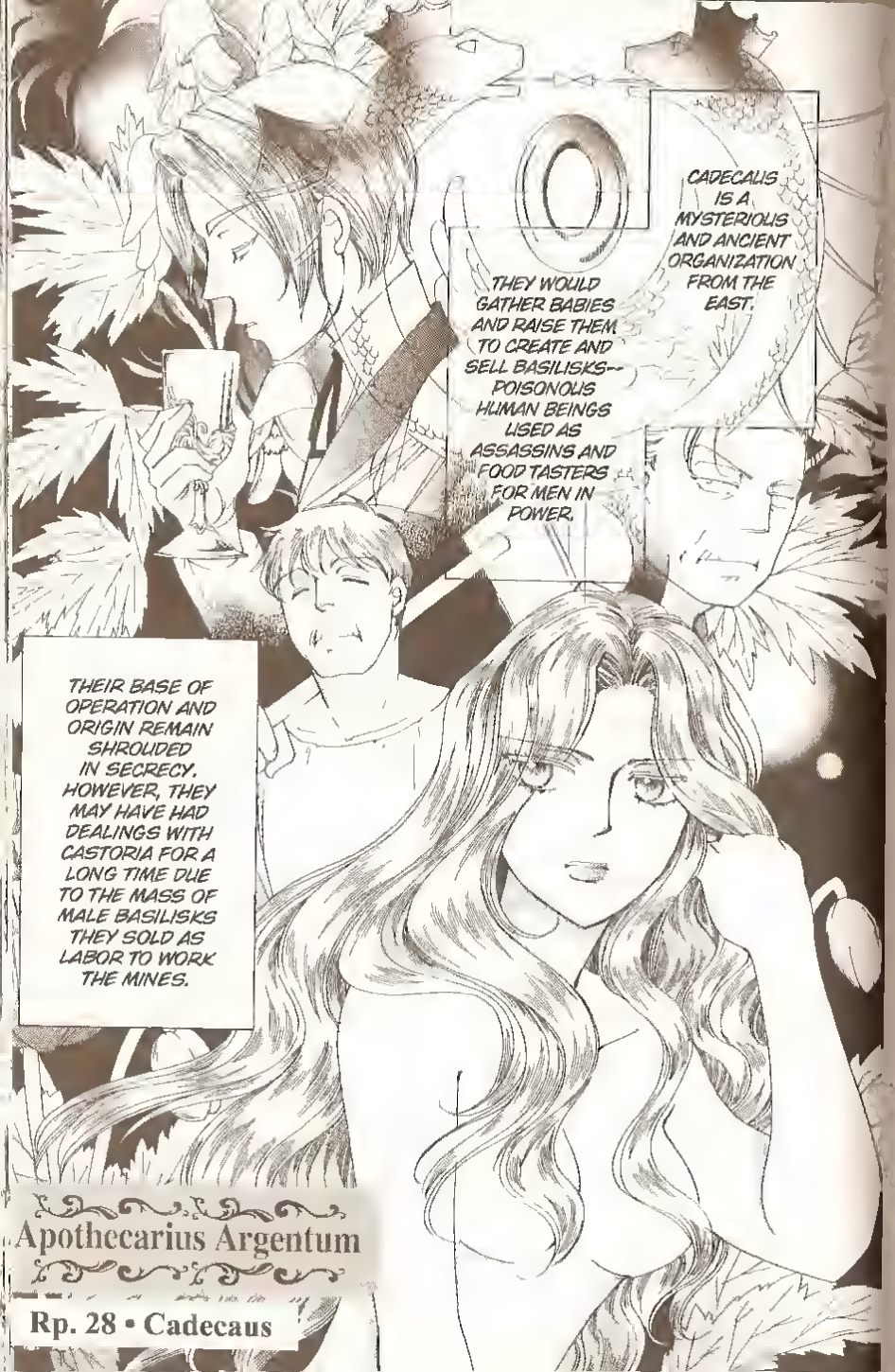
I'D LIKE TO STOP WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY COUNTRY.
IT'S NOT ABOUT REVENGE.
I'M STILL CONCERNED ABOUT ZETTON.
I'M SORRY, SODA.
I DON'T WANT TO INVOLVE ANYONE ELSE. I'LL BE MAKING THIS TRIP ALONE.
I WONDER HOW FAR WE'RE GOING...
CLATER
PLUCK
WAIT, THERE'S MORE DIAMONDS ON THE BROOCH MY FATHER GAVE ME.
THIS IS THE LAST DIAMOND I HAVE...

"IF I DON'T RETURN, PLEASE LOOK FOR DIAMONDS ON THE ROAD AND FOLLOW THAT PATH."
"SODA, I'LL GET BABY LULU BACK."
A LETTER FROM POPOLA TO YOU.
YEAH? THAT'S ME.
LET'S JUST SAY I'M HER CO-WORKER.
WHO ARE YOU? WHERE DID POPOLA GO?
CLATER
WHAT?!
SHE WENT TO ATTEND AN ENGAGEMENT FOR ZETTON.
POPOLA WENT WITH MISS AMETHYST, THE NUMBER ONE COURTESAN

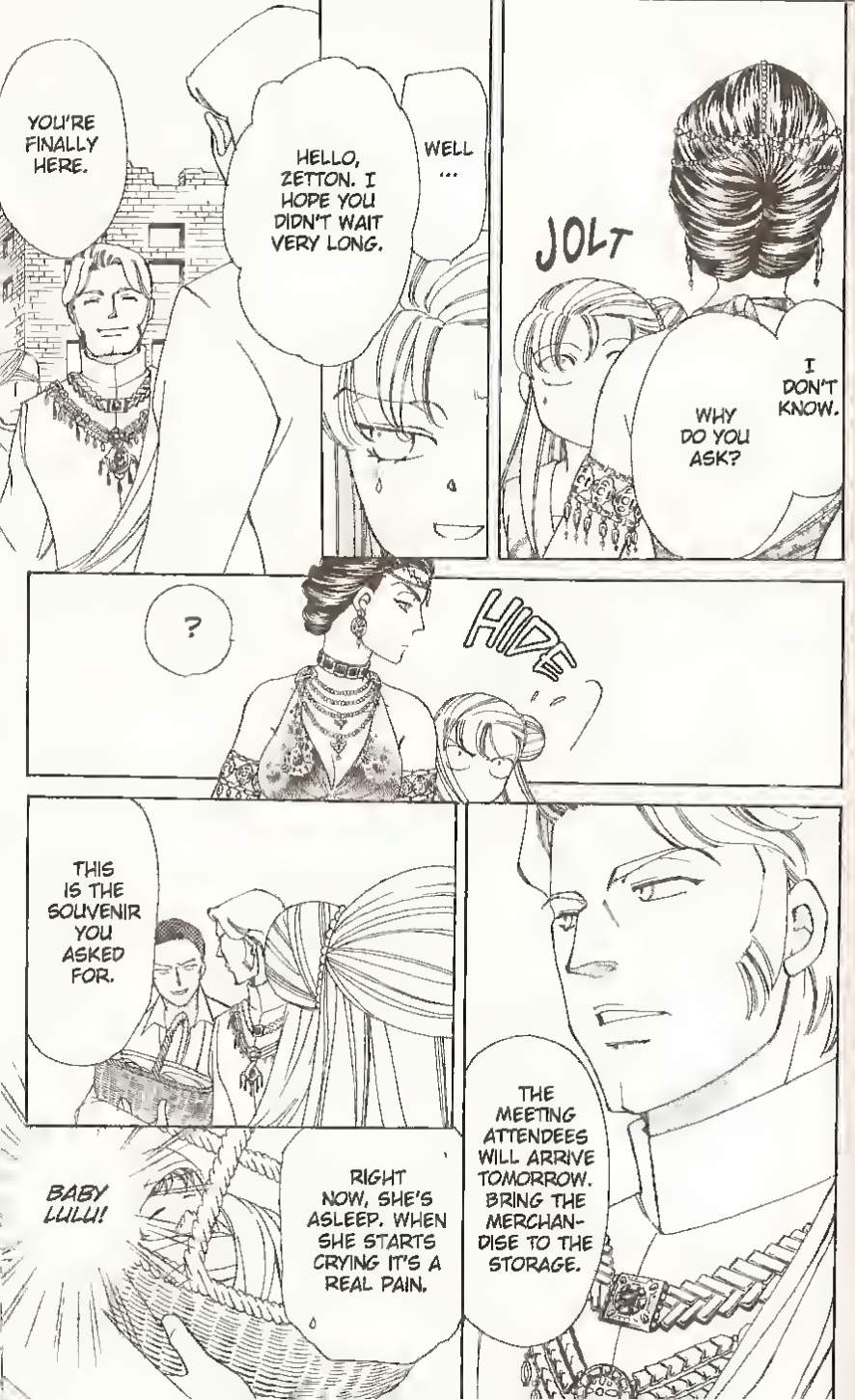

A LETTER FROM POPOLA TO YOU.
POPOLA WENT WITH MISS AMETHYST, THE NUMBER ONE COURTESAN. THEY ARE ATTENDING AN ENGAGEMENT FOR ZETTON.
"IF I DON'T RETURN, COME LOOK FOR ME. I'LL LEAVE A TRAIL OF DIAMONDS..."
"IT'S NOT ABOUT REVENGE. I'D LIKE TO STOP WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY COUNTRY!".
I'M SORRY, SODA. I'M STILL CONCERNED ABOUT ZETTON!"
I FOUND THE 32ND DIAMOND!
THE HORSES ARE EXHAUSTED.
COME ON, MISTER!
HURRY! POPOLA AND BABY LULU ARE BOTH IN DANGER!
THIS WAY!

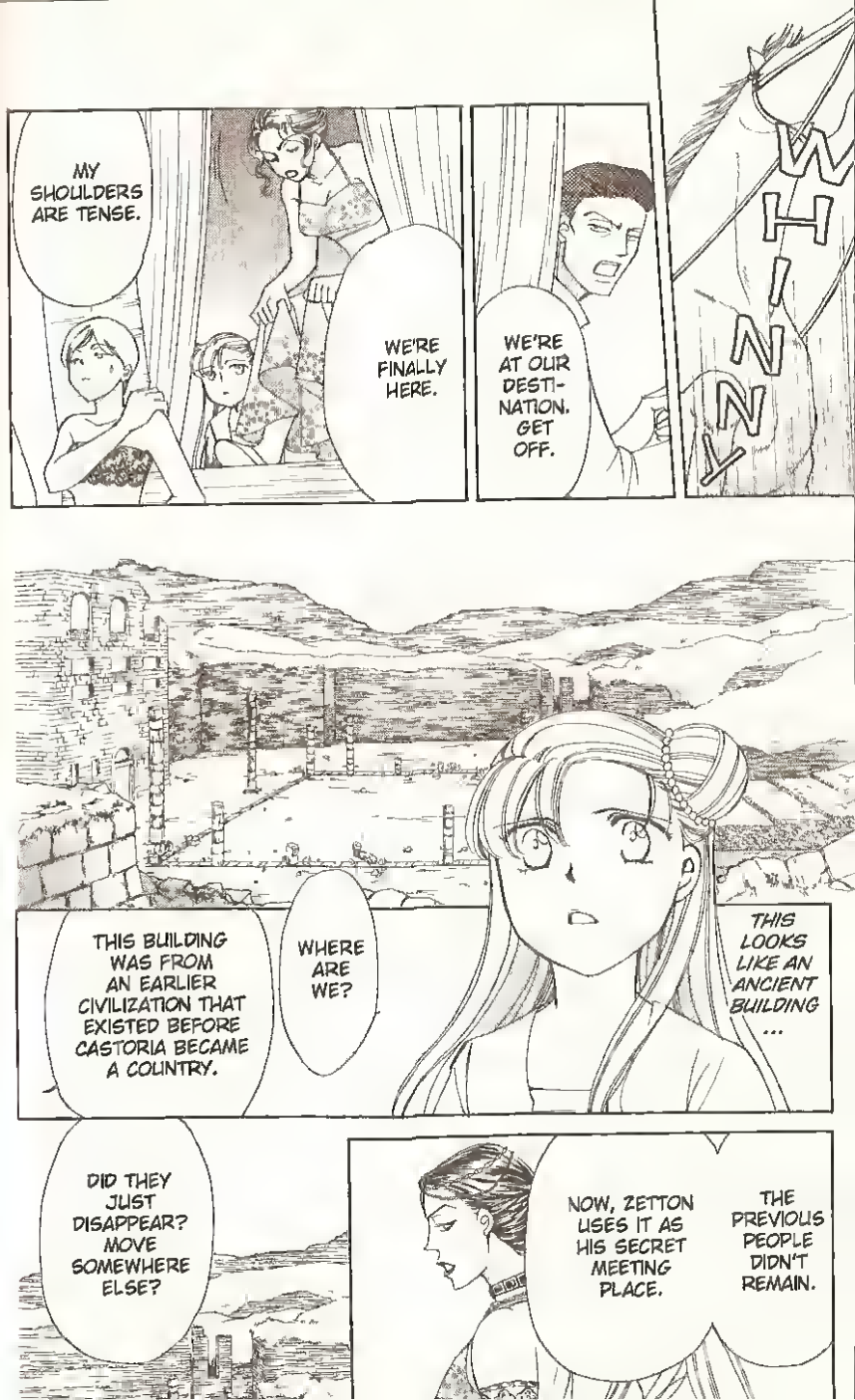

IF I DON'T RETURN, COME LOOK FOR ME.
I'LL LEAVE A TRAIL OF DIAMONDS ...

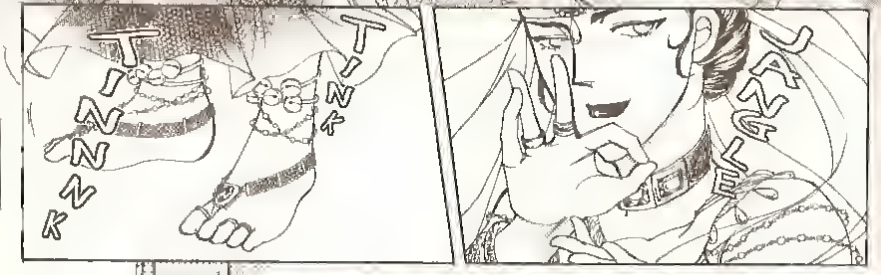
Rp 27/The End

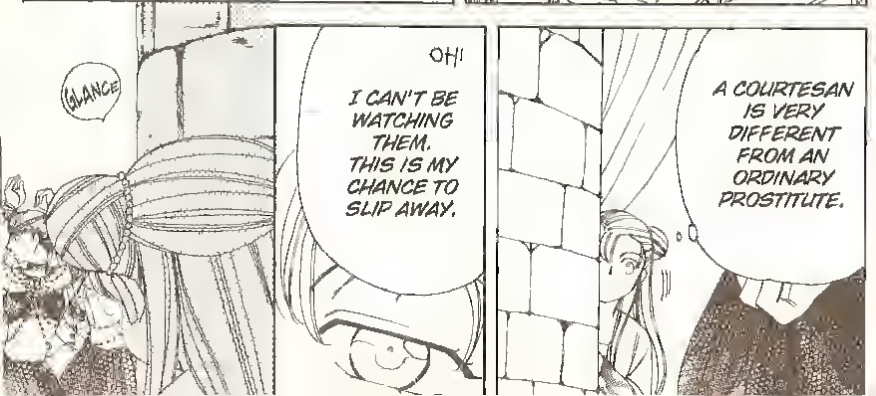

CADECAUS IS A MYSTERIOUS AND ANCIENT ORGANIZATION FROM THE EAST.
THEY WOULD GATHER BABIES AND RAISE THEM TO CREATE AND SELL BASILISKS--POISONOUS HUMAN BEINGS USED AS ASSASSINS AND FOOD TASTERS FOR MEN IN POWER.
THEIR BASE OF OPERATION AND ORIGIN REMAIN SHROUDED IN SECRECY. HOWEVER, THEY MAY HAVE HAD DEALINGS WITH CASTORIA FOR A LONG TIME DUE TO THE MASS OF MALE BASILISKS THEY SOLD AS LABOR TO WORK THE MINES.

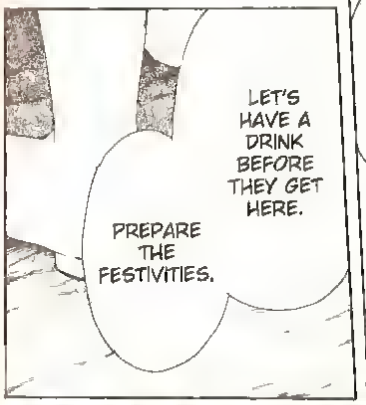
I WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ZETTON'S MEETING PLACE.
ARGENT, I'M GOING WITH YOU.
LULU, YOU SHOULDN'T PUSH YOURSELF TOO HARD.
SODA, THE HORSES NEED TO REST.
NOLA, EVERYONE, REST HERE. SODA AND I WILL FORGE AHEAD ON OUR OWN.
"MAYBE CASTORIA HAS SOME KIND OF DEALINGS WITH THEM."
"THEY'RE THE EVIL ORGANIZATION THAT RAISE BASILISKS."
"THE ONLY PEOPLE THAT I COULD THINK OF THAT WOULD TAKE INTEREST..."
"NOT TOO LONG AGO, IT WASN'T UNUSUAL FOR PEOPLE TO SELL BABIES."
"IF WE CAN FOLLOW ZETTON'S FOOTSTEPS, MAYBE WE CAN DISCOVER THE TRUTH BEHIND CADECAUS?"

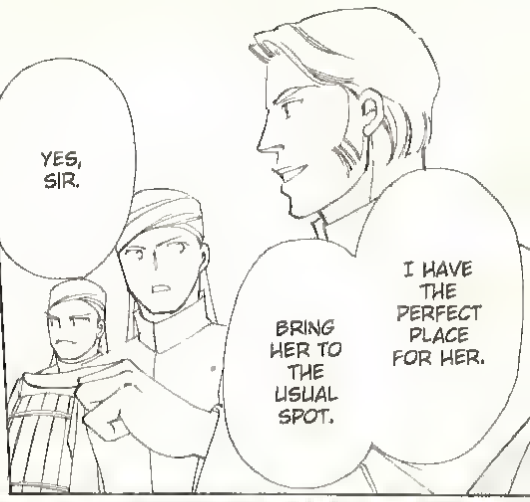

YOU'RE FINALLY HERE.
HELLO, ZETTON. I HOPE YOU DIDN'T WAIT VERY LONG.
WELL ...
JOLT
WHY DO YOU ASK?
I DON'T KNOW.
?
HIDE
THIS IS THE SOUVENIR YOU ASKED FOR.
BABY LULU!
RIGHT NOW, SHE'S ASLEEP. WHEN SHE STARTS CRYING IT'S A REAL PAIN.
THE MEETING ATTENDEES WILL ARRIVE TOMORROW. BRING THE MERCHANDISE TO THE STORAGE.

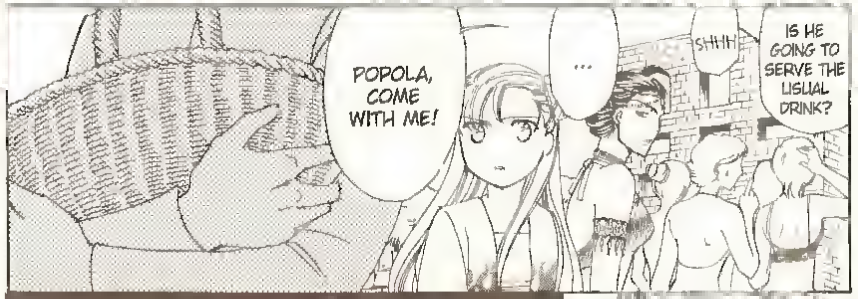

MY SHOULDERS ARE TENSE.
WE'RE FINALLY HERE.
WE'RE AT OUR DESTINATION. GET OFF.
WHINNY
THIS BUILDING WAS FROM AN EARLIER CIVILIZATION THAT EXISTED BEFORE CASTORIA BECAME A COUNTRY.
WHERE ARE WE?
THIS LOOKS LIKE AN ANCIENT BUILDING ...
DID THEY JUST DISAPPEAR? MOVE SOMEWHERE ELSE?
NOW, ZETTON USES IT AS HIS SECRET MEETING PLACE.
THE PREVIOUS PEOPLE DIDN'T REMAIN.

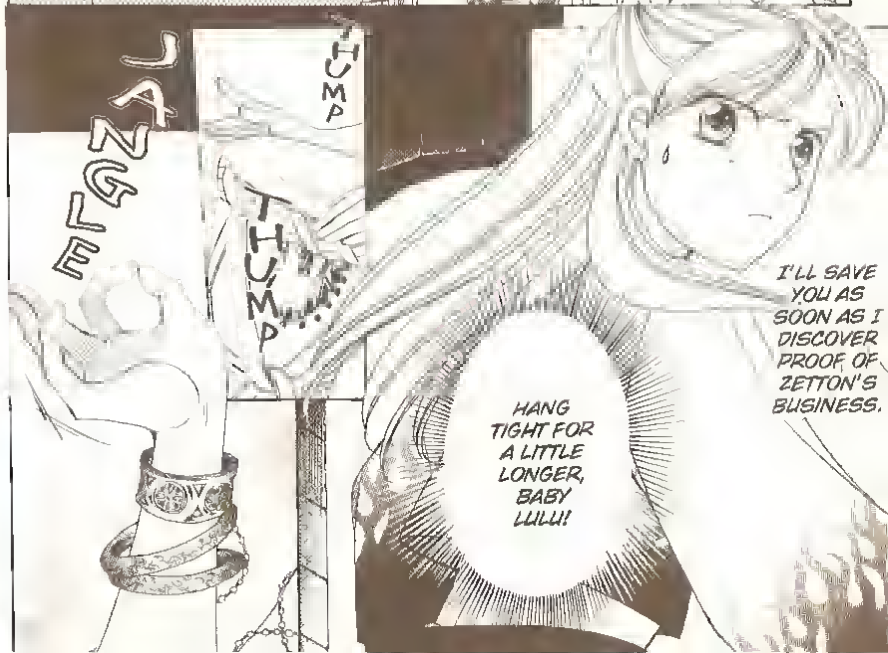

JINNNK
TINK
JANGLE


GLANCE
OH!
I CAN'T BE WATCHING THEM. THIS IS MY CHANCE TO SLIP AWAY.
A COURTESAN IS VERY DIFFERENT FROM AN ORDINARY PROSTITUTE.


PREPARE THE FESTIVITIES.
LET'S HAVE A DRINK BEFORE THEY GET HERE.

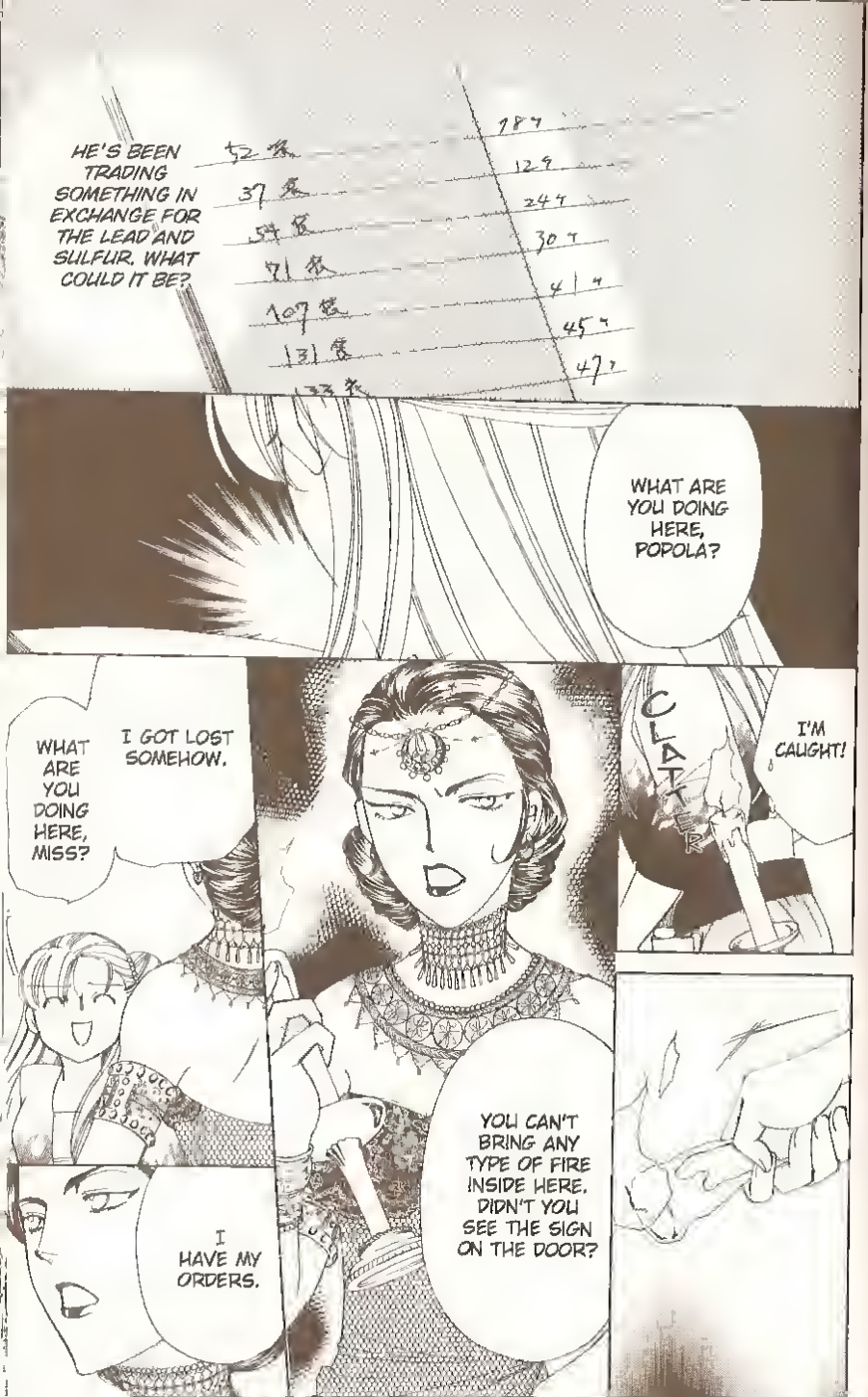

YES, SIR.
BRING HER TO THE USUAL SPOT.
I HAVE THE PERFECT PLACE FOR HER.


POPOLA, COME WITH ME!
...
SHHH
IS HE GOING TO SERVE THE USUAL DRINK?


JANGLE
THUMP
THUMP...
HANG TIGHT FOR A LITTLE LONGER, BABY LULU!
I'LL SAVE YOU AS SOON AS I DISCOVER PROOF OF ZETTON'S BUSINESS.

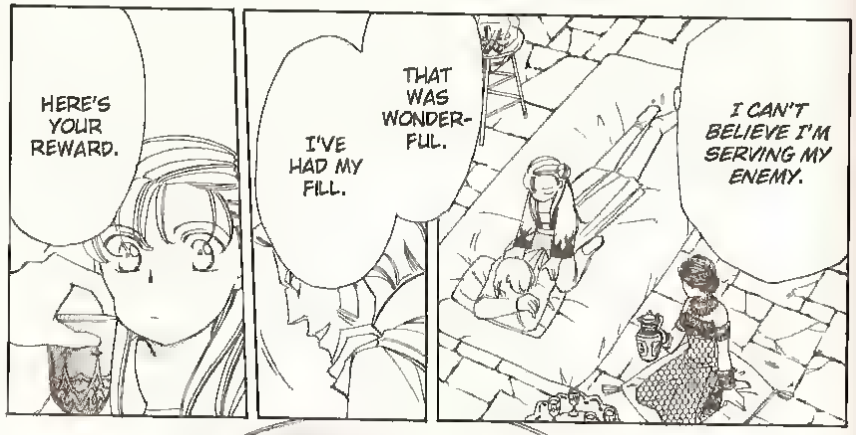
WE'VE FOUND THEM!
THIS IS ZETTON'S MEETING PLACE?
YOU SEARCH INSIDE THE BUILDINGS. ARGENT AND I WILL SEARCH THE NEARBY CAVES.
WE'LL BE EASIER TO SPOT IF WE STAY TOGETHER. WE SHOULD SPLIT UP.
WAIT!
LET'S SEARCH FOR POPOLA!
IT LOOKS LIKE JUST ZETTON AND HIS MEN ARE HERE.

I'M SORRY, MISS. AMETHYST!
LULU, MASTER! THIS WAY!
I FOUND THE 50TH DIAMOND!
I'M GETTING A STRANGE FEELING AS WE GET CLOSER...
MASTER!
WHAT IS THIS FEELING?
NO, I'M FINE.
WHY ARE YOU SO QUIET?
ARE YOU TIRED ALREADY?

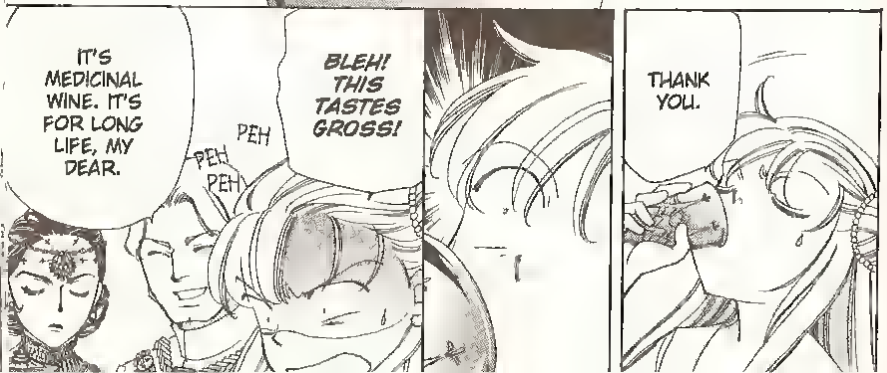

HE'S BEEN TRADING SOMETHING IN EXCHANGE FOR THE LEAD AND SULFUR. WHAT COULD IT BE?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, POPOLA?
I'M CAUGHT!
CLATTER
I GOT LOST SOMEHOW.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE, MISS?
YOU CAN'T BRING ANY TYPE OF FIRE INSIDE HERE. DIDN'T YOU SEE THE SIGN ON THE DOOR?
I HAVE MY ORDERS.

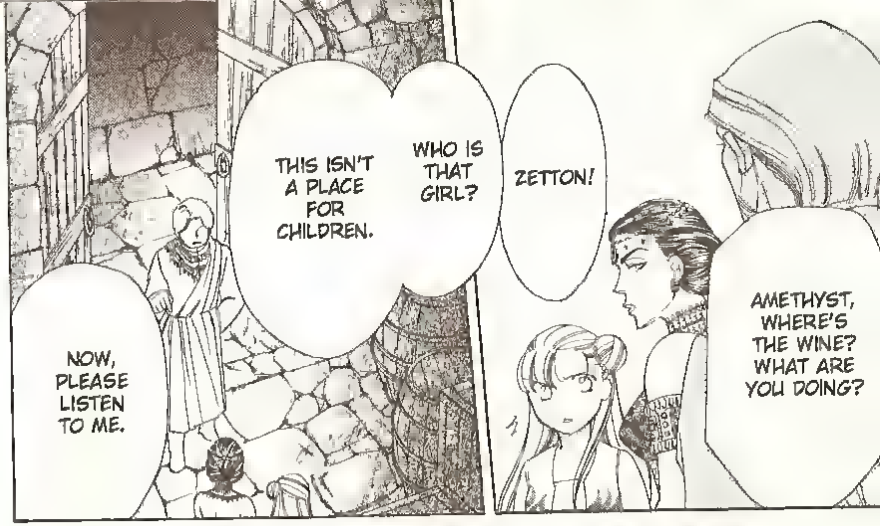
WHERE?
JUST FOLLOW ME.
ARGENT, YOU'RE GOING TO COME WITH ME.
I'LL SEE YOU LATER.
CREAK
THIS LOOKS LIKE THE STORAGE ROOM.
THEY'VE BEEN TRADING FOR ABOUT TWO DECADES.
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
THAT COINCIDES WITH THE RISE OF THE SOUTHERN EMPIRE.
THERE SHOULD BE RECORDS OF SOME KIND.
I SEE THEM!
OH?

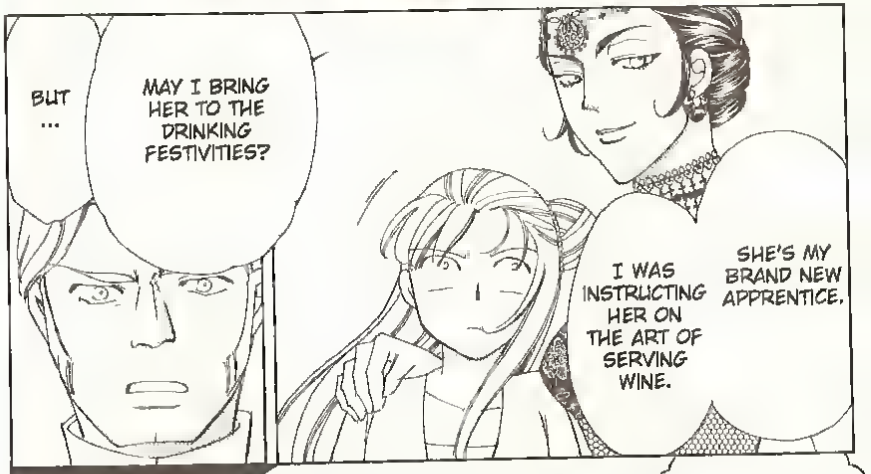
THIS IS QUITE RELAXING.

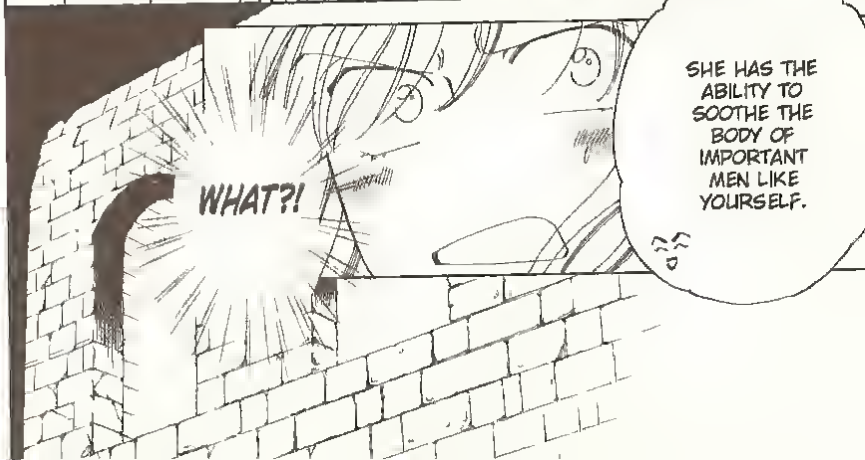

HERE'S YOUR REWARD.
I'VE HAD MY FILL.
THAT WAS WONDER-FUL.
I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SERVING MY ENEMY.

IS THIS WINE?


IT'S MEDICINAL WINE. IT'S FOR LONG LIFE, MY DEAR.
PEH
PEH
PEH
BLEH! THIS TASTES GROSS!
THANK YOU.

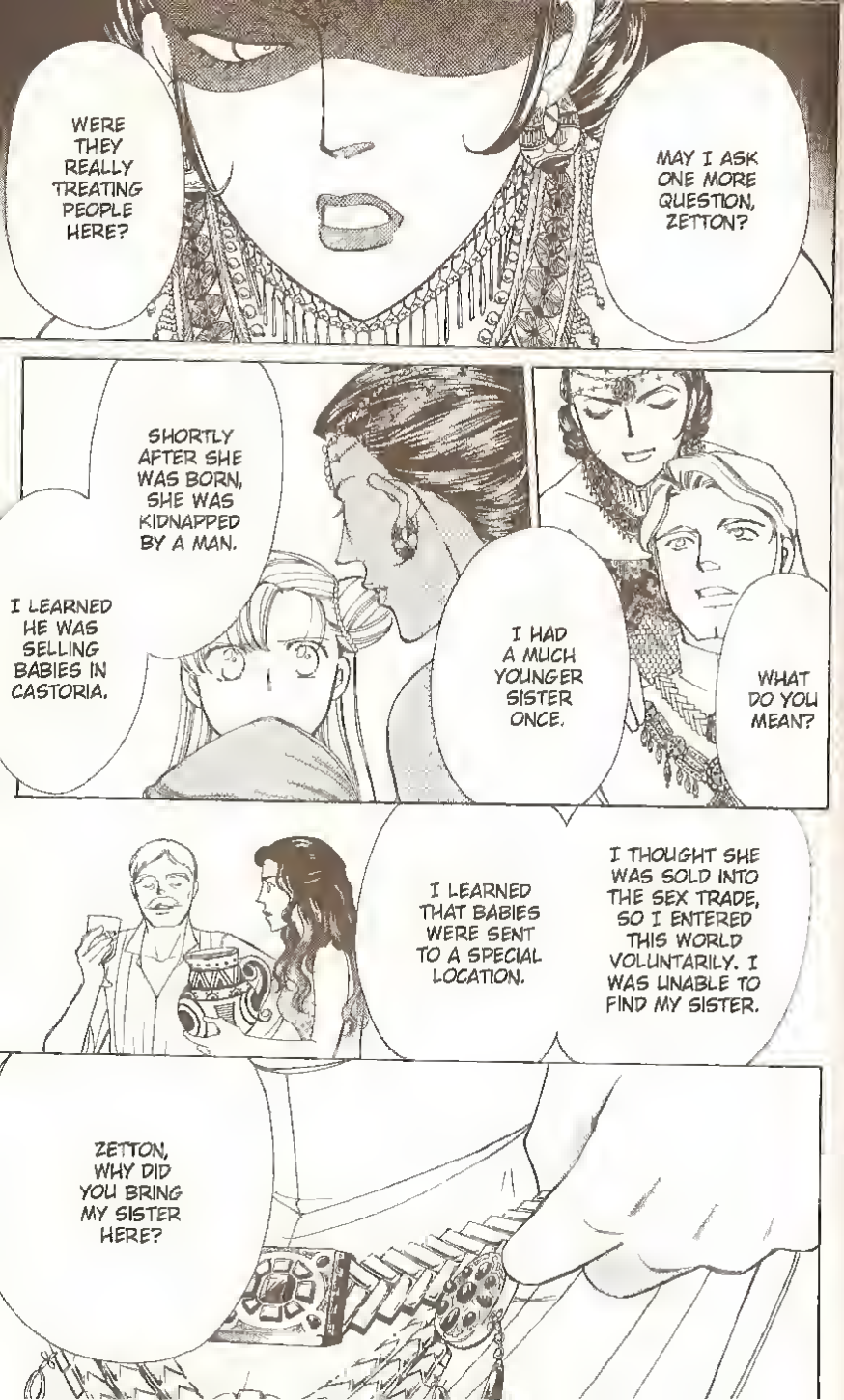

NOW, PLEASE LISTEN TO ME.
THIS ISN'T A PLACE FOR CHILDREN.
WHO IS THAT GIRL?
ZETTON!
AMETHYST, WHERE'S THE WINE? WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

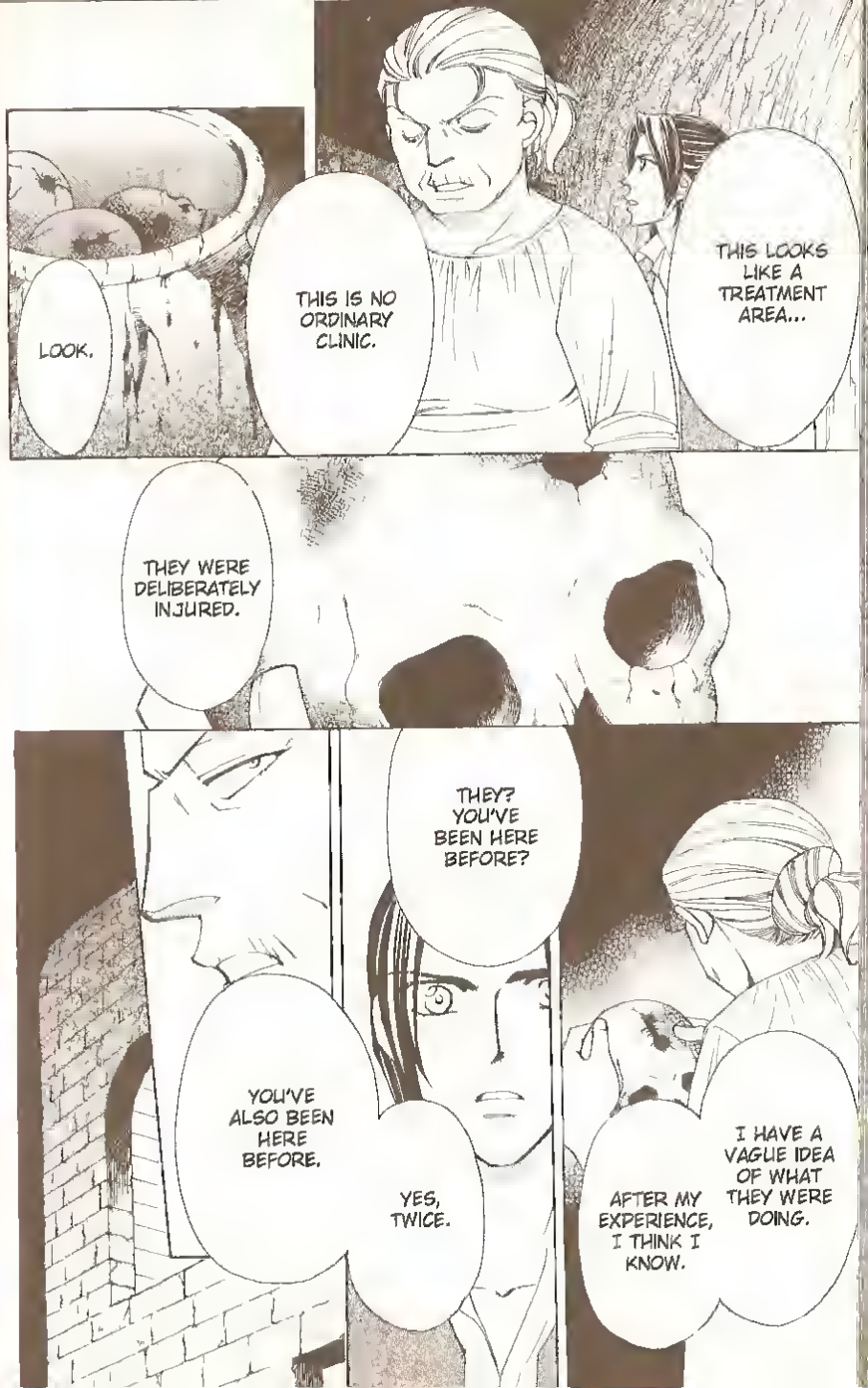

BUT ...
MAY I BRING HER TO THE DRINKING FESTIVITIES?
I WAS INSTRUCTING HER ON THE ART OF SERVING WINE.
SHE'S MY BRAND NEW APPRENTICE.


WHAT?!
SHE HAS THE ABILITY TO SOOTHE THE BODY OF IMPORTANT MEN LIKE YOURSELF.

BEFORE CASTORIA EXISTED, THERE USED TO BE AN ADVANCED CIVILIZATION HERE.
THE PRIOR CIVILIZATION DISAPPEARED A LONG TIME AGO.
IT'S BEEN SAID THAT CASTORIA WAS ERECTED FROM A PORTION OF THAT CIVILIZATION.
OVER HERE
IT DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE AN ORDINARY VILLAGE.
SO WHAT WAS THIS PLACE?
THIS PLACE USED TO BE SURROUNDED BY GREENERY. THEY WOULD GATHER PATIENTS IN NEED OF HEALING AND TREAT THEM HERE.
IT WAS A TEMPLE USED FOR HEALING.

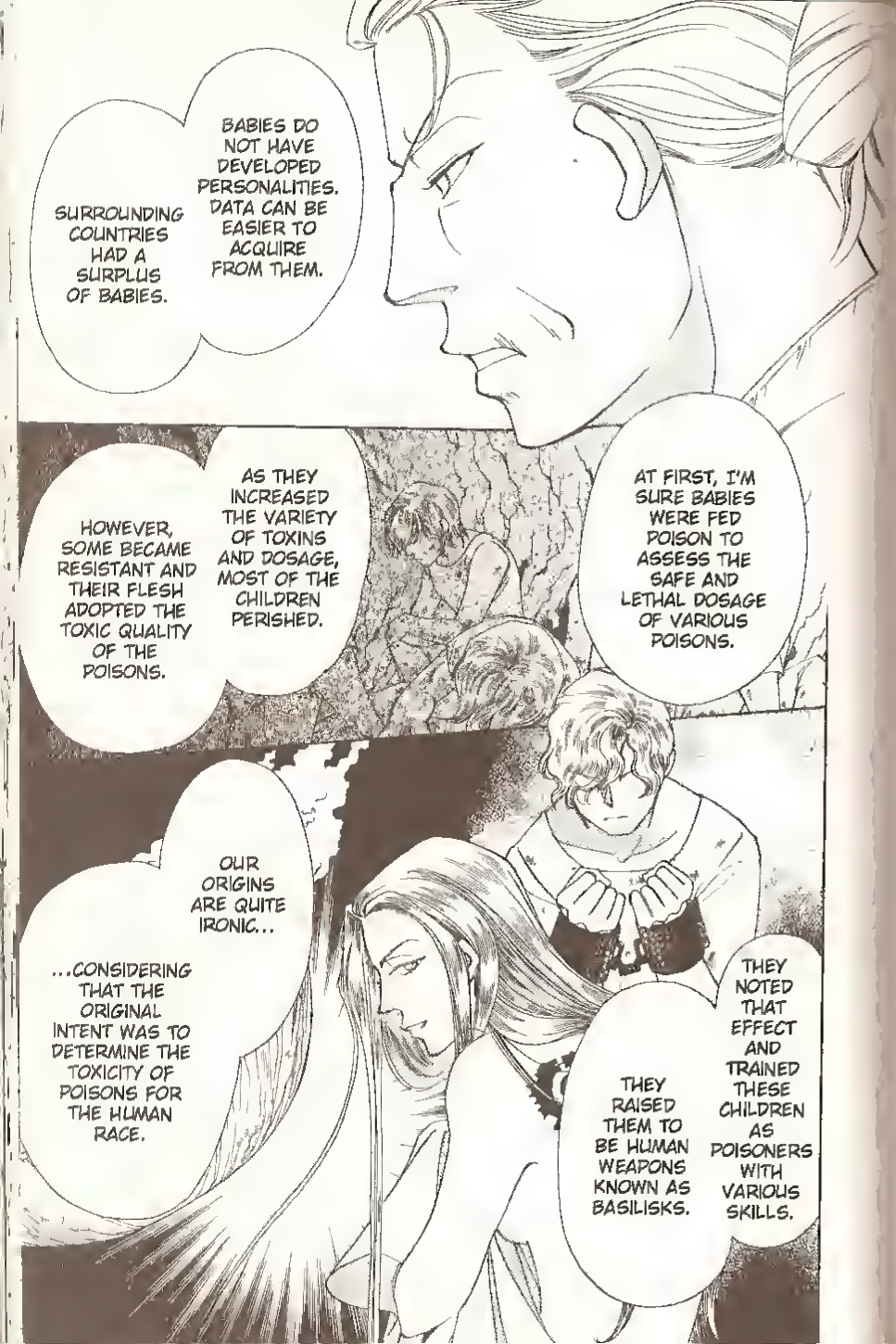
ZETTON, SHE'S JUST A CHILD. PLEASE GO EASY ON HER.
THIS IS WHAT THE WOMEN WERE TALKING ABOUT...
THE TASTE LEAVES A LOT TO BE DESIRED, BUT IT CAN BECOME ADDICTIVE OVER TIME.
I'D LOVE TO HEAR THE HISTORY OF THIS PLACE AND THE RISE OF CASTORIA.
PLEASE CONTINUE YOUR STORY FROM EARLIER.
IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT FOR THE TRAINING OF MY YOUNG APPRENTICE.
MISS ...?
ALL RIGHT.
YOU ENJOY BORING STORIES, DON'T YOU.
AS THE "DIPLOMAT OF THE NIGHT," IT'S MY MINIMAL DUTY TO KNOW MY COUNTRY'S HISTORY AND ORIGIN.


WERE THEY REALLY TREATING PEOPLE HERE?
MAY I ASK ONE MORE QUESTION, ZETTON?
SHORTLY AFTER SHE WAS BORN, SHE WAS KIDNAPPED BY A MAN.
I LEARNED HE WAS SELLING BABIES IN CASTORIA.
I HAD A MUCH YOUNGER SISTER ONCE.
WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
I LEARNED THAT BABIES WERE SENT TO A SPECIAL LOCATION.
I THOUGHT SHE WAS SOLD INTO THE SEX TRADE, SO I ENTERED THIS WORLD VOLUNTARILY. I WAS UNABLE TO FIND MY SISTER.
ZETTON, WHY DID YOU BRING MY SISTER HERE?

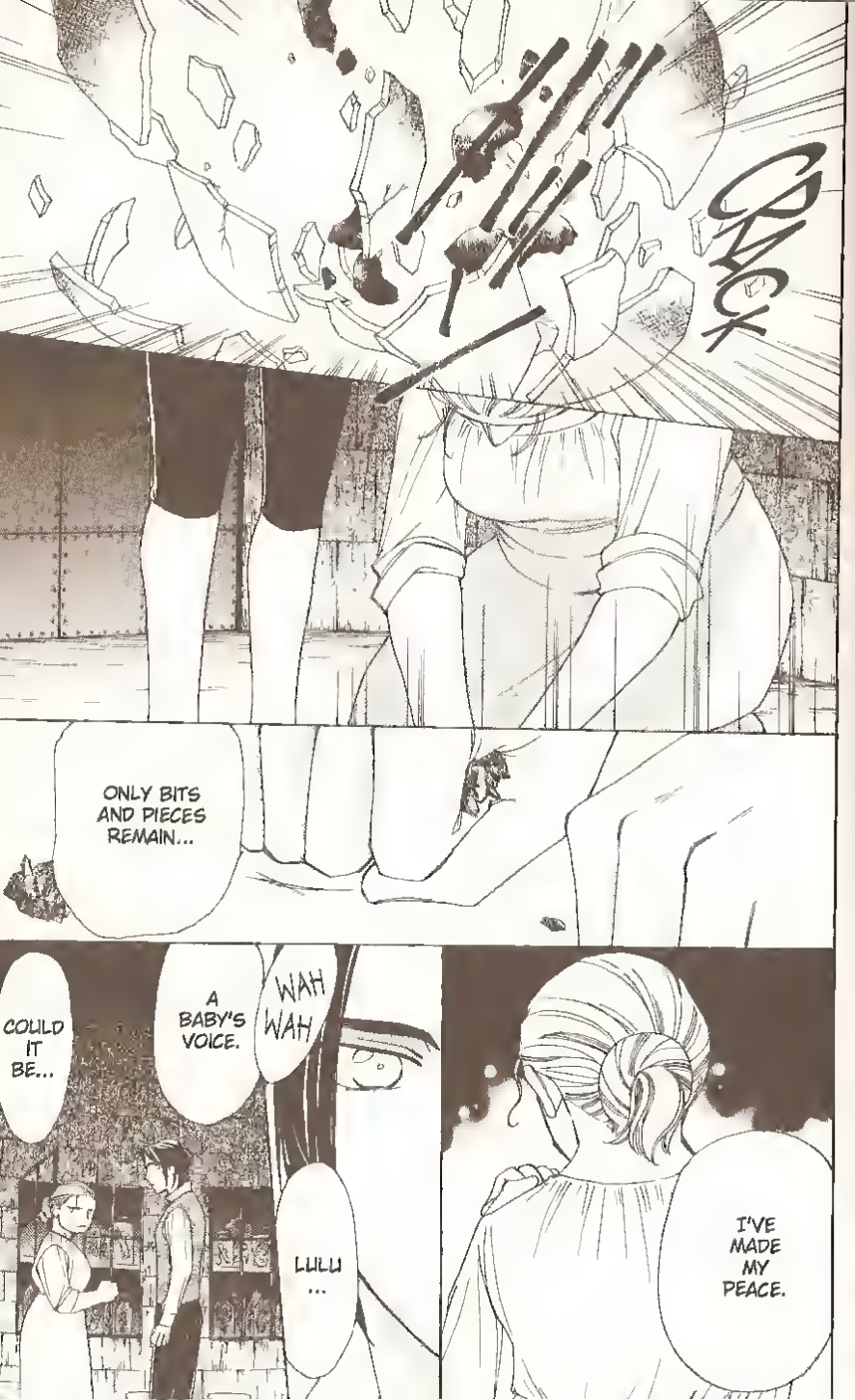

LOOK.
THIS IS NO ORDINARY CLINIC.
THIS LOOKS LIKE A TREATMENT AREA...
THEY WERE DELIBERATELY INJURED.
THEY? YOU'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE?
YOU'VE ALSO BEEN HERE BEFORE.
YES, TWICE.
AFTER MY EXPERIENCE, I THINK I KNOW.
I HAVE A VAGUE IDEA OF WHAT THEY WERE DOING.

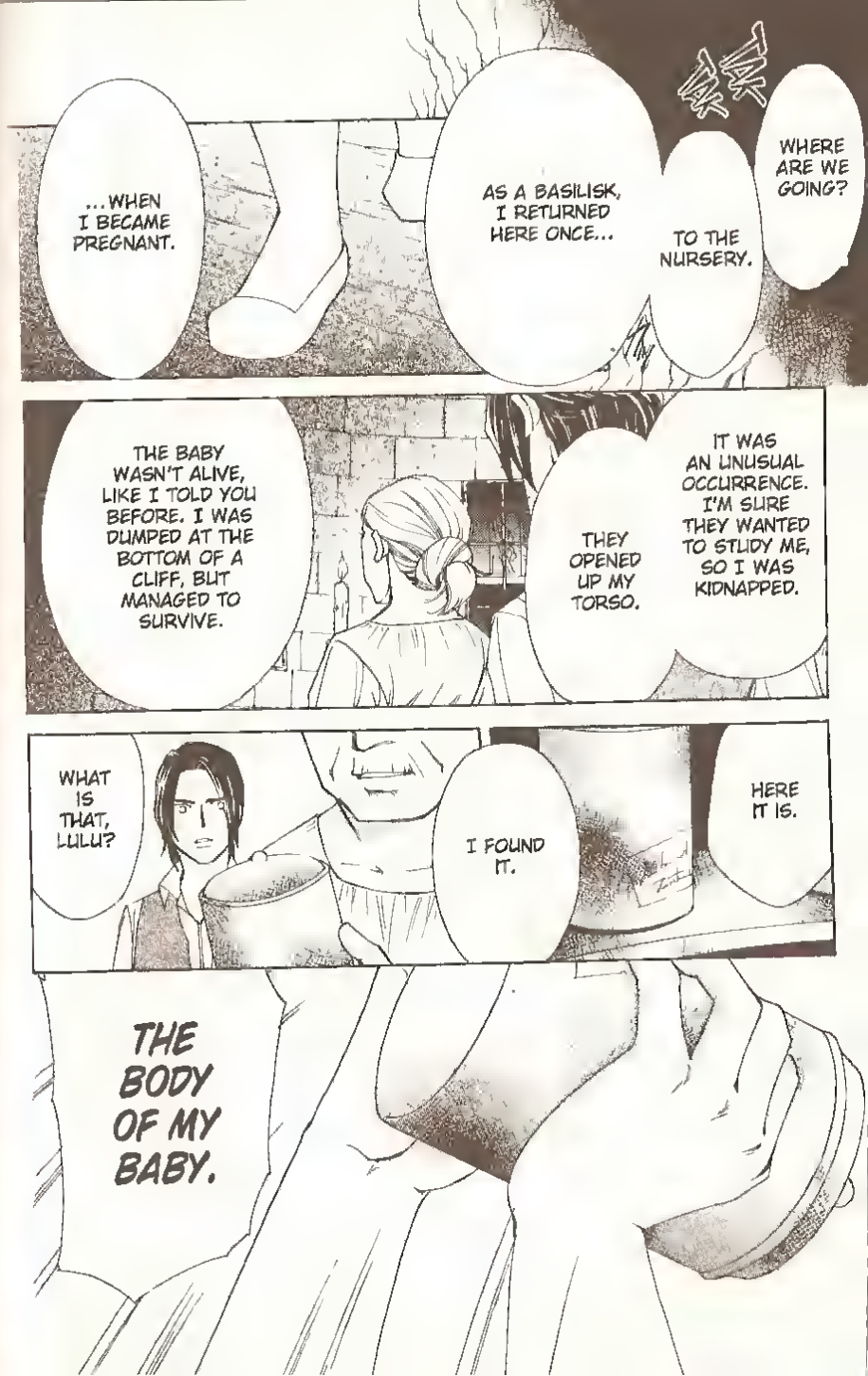
A FACTION OF THEM BECAME OBSESSED WITH THE SEARCH FOR INFORMATION.
THEY WANTED TO BENEFIT HUMANKIND. THEY WERE SEEKING CURES AND ANSWERS TO THE MYSTERIES OF THE HUMAN BODY.
THEY STEPPED INTO THE REALM OF NO RETURN.
THEY TESTED THEIR FINDINGS ON LIVE SUBJECTS.
AT FIRST, THEY TESTED THEIR CURES ON CRIMINALS AND THE HOMELESS.
EVENTUALLY, THEY WERE DROWNING IN POWER AND MONEY DUE TO THE RESULTS OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE. THEY WENT UNDERGROUND, OPERATED IN SECRET AND SURVIVED THE COLLAPSE OF THEIR CIVILIZATION.
THEY REALIZED POISON COULD BE MEDICINAL, DEPENDING ON THE DOSAGE. SOON, THEY WERE TESTING THE EFFICACY OF POISONS ON NEWBORN BABIES.

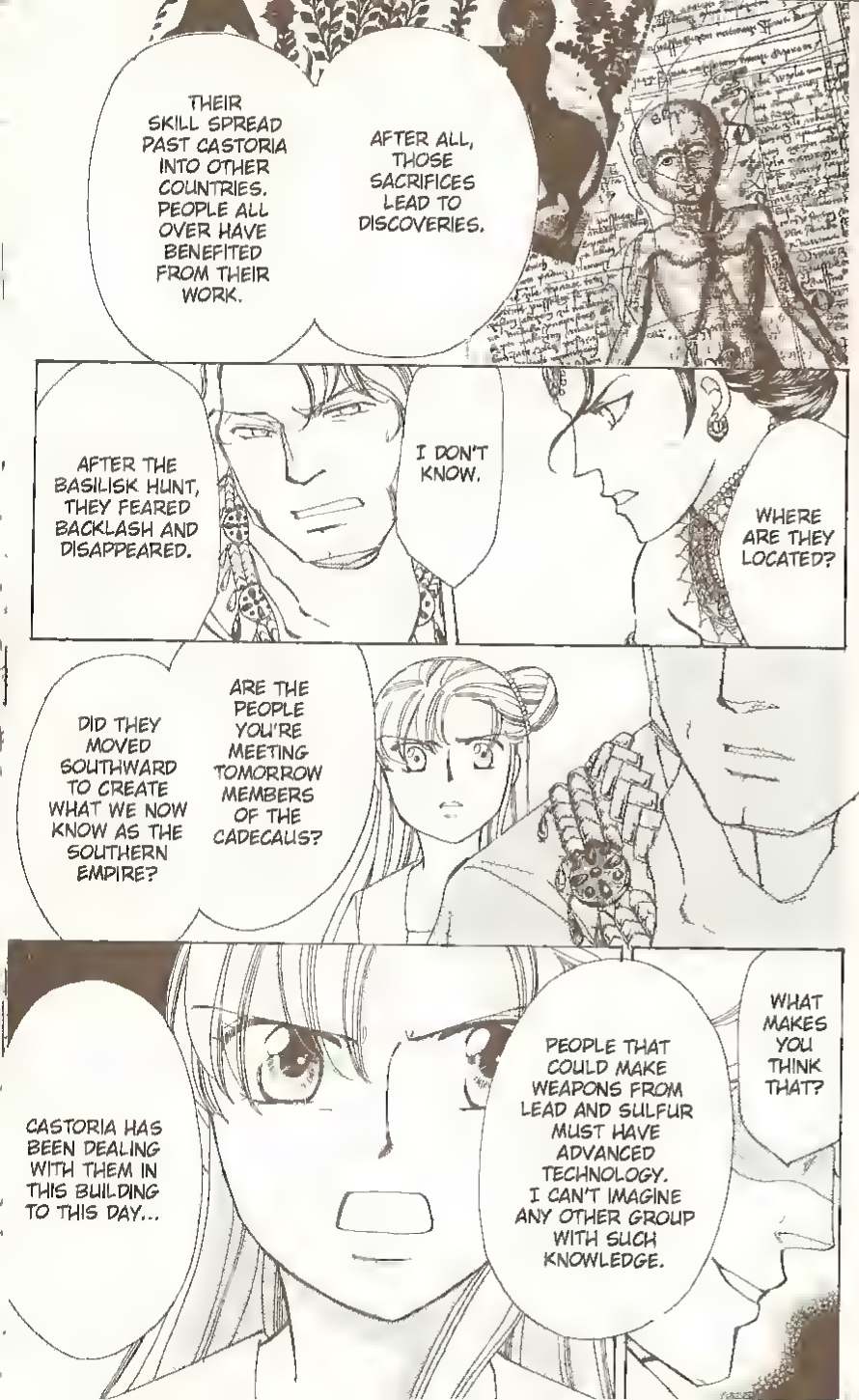
TUG
YOU'VE LOST YOUR STRENGTH!
IT'S THE DRUGGED WINE COMBINED WITH THE MASSAGE.
MISS!
WHAT HAPPENED TO THE BABIES?
YOU'RE HERE TO...
THAT'S RIGHT.
I BECAME THE TOP COURTESAN TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WERE DOING.
MISS!
I UNDER-STAND.
I'LL ANSWER, SINCE YOU'VE RISKED YOUR LIFE.
POPOLA, YOU'RE HERE FOR THE SAME THING, RIGHT?
YOU VOLUNTEERED TO COME HERE. YOU MUST HAVE WANTED INFORMATION.


BABIES DO NOT HAVE DEVELOPED PERSONALITIES. DATA CAN BE EASIER TO ACQUIRE FROM THEM.
SURROUNDING COUNTRIES HAD A SURPLUS OF BABIES.
AS THEY INCREASED THE VARIETY OF TOXINS AND DOSAGE, MOST OF THE CHILDREN PERISHED.
HOWEVER, SOME BECAME RESISTANT AND THEIR FLESH ADOPTED THE TOXIC QUALITY OF THE POISONS.
AT FIRST, I'M SURE BABIES WERE FED POISON TO ASSESS THE SAFE AND LETHAL DOSAGE OF VARIOUS POISONS.
OUR ORIGINS ARE QUITE IRONIC...
...CONSIDERING THAT THE ORIGINAL INTENT WAS TO DETERMINE THE TOXICITY OF POISONS FOR THE HUMAN RACE.
THEY RAISED THEM TO BE HUMAN WEAPONS KNOWN AS BASILISKS.
THEY NOTED THAT EFFECT AND TRAINED THESE CHILDREN AS POISONERS WITH VARIOUS SKILLS.

BABIES... POISON. COULD THIS BE...
THEY ARE THE CADECAUS.
THIS IS WHERE THEY RAISED BASILISKS.
I TOLD YOU BEFORE THAT IN ORDER TO FIND CERTAIN CURES...
...CONSIDERABLE SACRIFICE MAY BE REQUIRED.
NOW I UNDERSTAND WHAT I WAS SENSING...
HERE...?

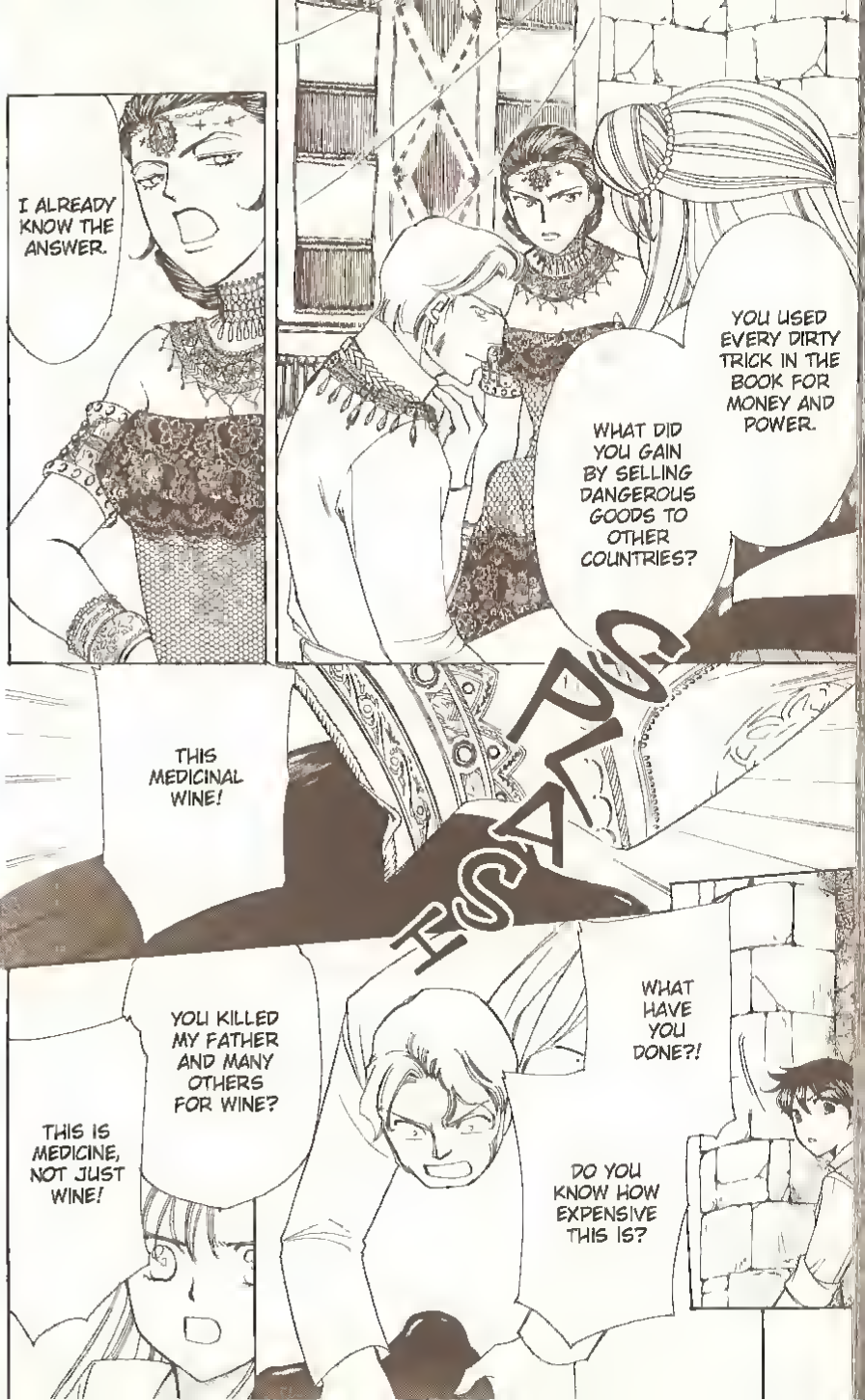

CRACK
ONLY BITS AND PIECES REMAIN...
COULD IT BE...
A BABY'S VOICE.
WAH WAH
LULU ...
I'VE MADE MY PEACE.

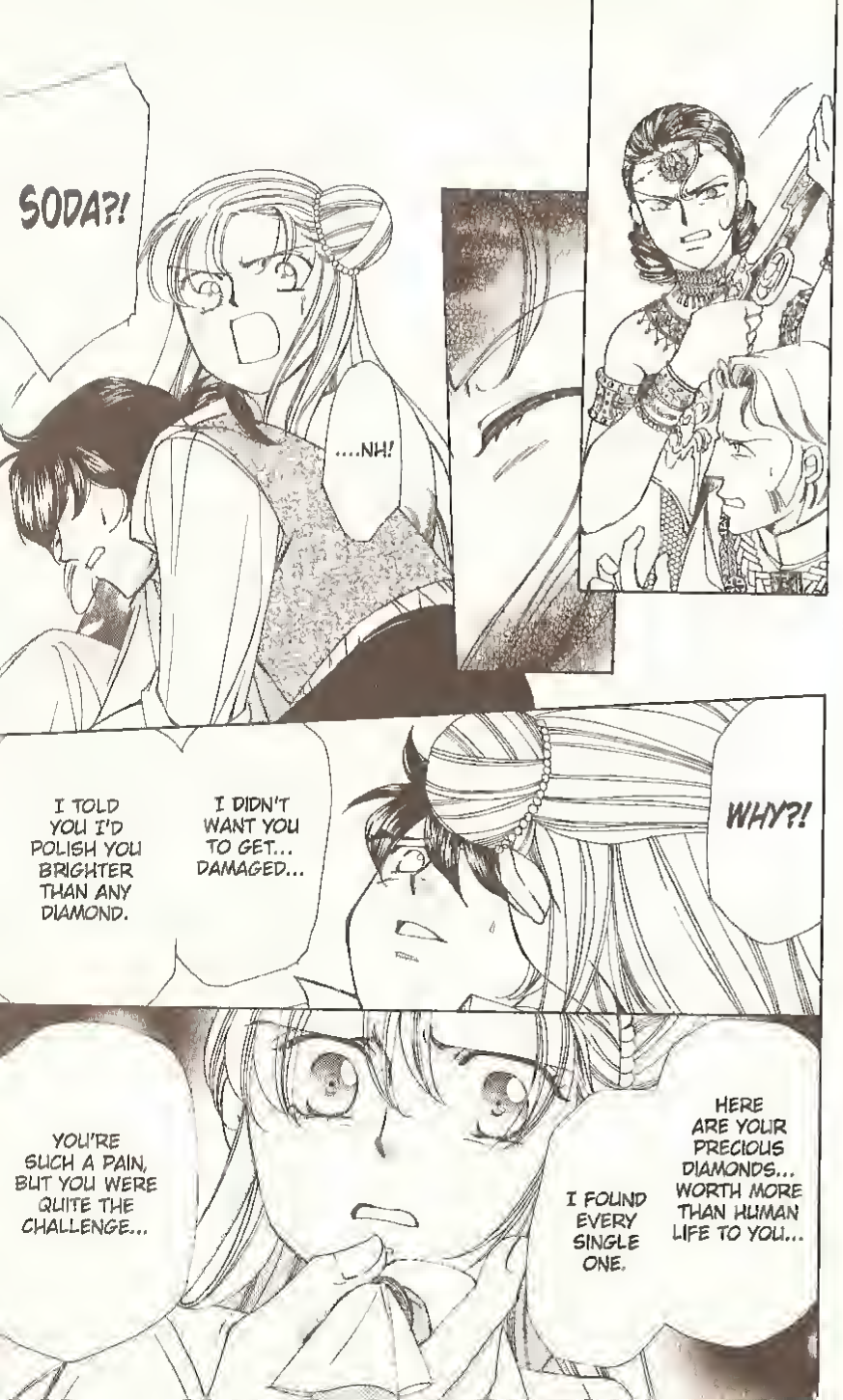

TAK TAK
WHERE ARE WE GOING?
TO THE NURSERY.
AS A BASILISK, I RETURNED HERE ONCE...
...WHEN I BECAME PREGNANT.
IT WAS AN UNUSUAL OCCURRENCE. I'M SURE THEY WANTED TO STUDY ME, SO I WAS KIDNAPPED.
THEY OPENED UP MY TORSO.
THE BABY WASN'T ALIVE, LIKE I TOLD YOU BEFORE. I WAS DUMPED AT THE BOTTOM OF A CLIFF, BUT MANAGED TO SURVIVE.
HERE IT IS.
I FOUND IT.
WHAT IS THAT, LULU?
THE BODY OF MY BABY.


THEIR SKILL SPREAD PAST CASTORIA INTO OTHER COUNTRIES. PEOPLE ALL OVER HAVE BENEFITED FROM THEIR WORK.
AFTER ALL, THOSE SACRIFICES LEAD TO DISCOVERIES.
AFTER THE BASILISK HUNT, THEY FEARED BACKLASH AND DISAPPEARED.
I DON'T KNOW.
WHERE ARE THEY LOCATED?
DID THEY MOVED SOUTHWARD TO CREATE WHAT WE NOW KNOW AS THE SOUTHERN EMPIRE?
ARE THE PEOPLE YOU'RE MEETING TOMORROW MEMBERS OF THE CADECAUS?
CASTORIA HAS BEEN DEALING WITH THEM IN THIS BUILDING TO THIS DAY...
PEOPLE THAT COULD MAKE WEAPONS FROM LEAD AND SULFUR MUST HAVE ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY. I CAN'T IMAGINE ANY OTHER GROUP WITH SUCH KNOWLEDGE.
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THAT?

BABY LULU!
WAAA!
WAAA!
SLAM
MISS!
YOU'RE TELLING ME MY SISTER WAS SACRIFICED AS AN EXPERIMENT?!
YOU CAN'T SAY WHAT THEY DID WAS ENTIRELY CRUEL.
SLAM
I'M GLAD YOU'RE STILL SAFE.
LET'S GET YOU BACK TO YOUR MOTHER.

YOU WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND!
EVERLASTING LIFE CAN'T BE BOUGHT BY THE MOST POWERFUL MEN WITH ALL THE MONEY AND DIAMONDS IN THE WORLD!
WHAT'S THE VALUE OF THAT, ANYWAY?
HE BELIEVES IT'S AN ELIXIR TO EVERLASTING LIFE.
A UTOPIA! A COUNTRY FREE OF ILLNESS AND WEAKNESS!
IN A NEW PLACE, THEY ARE TRYING TO DEVELOP SOMETHING NEW ON THEIR OWN...
THEY HAVE THE TECHNOLOGY!
THEY'RE RESPONSIBLE FOR CASTORIA'S WEALTH, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE!
THAT'S NOT ALL! BY SUPPLYING MATERIALS FOR THEIR WEAPONS, THEY HAVE SECRETLY AGREED NOT TO INVADE CASTORIA.

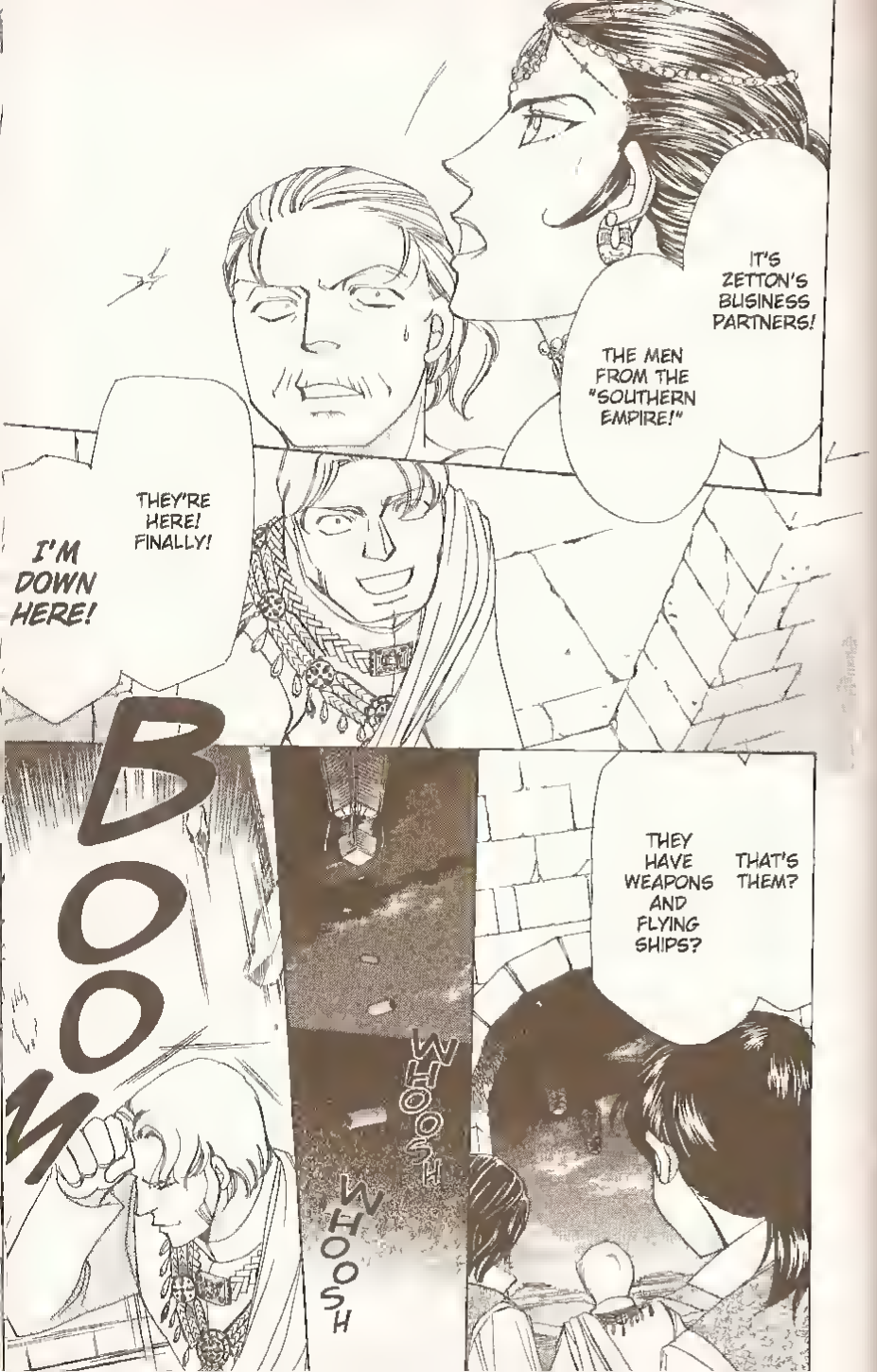

I ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER.
YOU USED EVERY DIRTY TRICK IN THE BOOK FOR MONEY AND POWER.
WHAT DID YOU GAIN BY SELLING DANGEROUS GOODS TO OTHER COUNTRIES?
THIS MEDICINAL WINE!
ESAS
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?!
YOU KILLED MY FATHER AND MANY OTHERS FOR WINE?
THIS IS MEDICINE, NOT JUST WINE!
DO YOU KNOW HOW EXPENSIVE THIS IS?


SODA?!
....NH!
WHY?!
I DIDN'T WANT YOU TO GET... DAMAGED...
I TOLD YOU I'D POLISH YOU BRIGHTER THAN ANY DIAMOND.
HERE ARE YOUR PRECIOUS DIAMONDS... WORTH MORE THAN HUMAN LIFE TO YOU...
I FOUND EVERY SINGLE ONE.
YOU'RE SUCH A PAIN, BUT YOU WERE QUITE THE CHALLENGE...

YOU'RE POPOLA, THE DAUGHTER OF A DIAMOND MINE OWNER!
I REMEMBER YOU NOW!
GIVE ME THE REST OF THE WINE!
SORRY TO SAY, BUT YOUR LIFE ENDS HERE!
POPOLA!
A GUN-SHOT?
THAT WAY!
BOOM

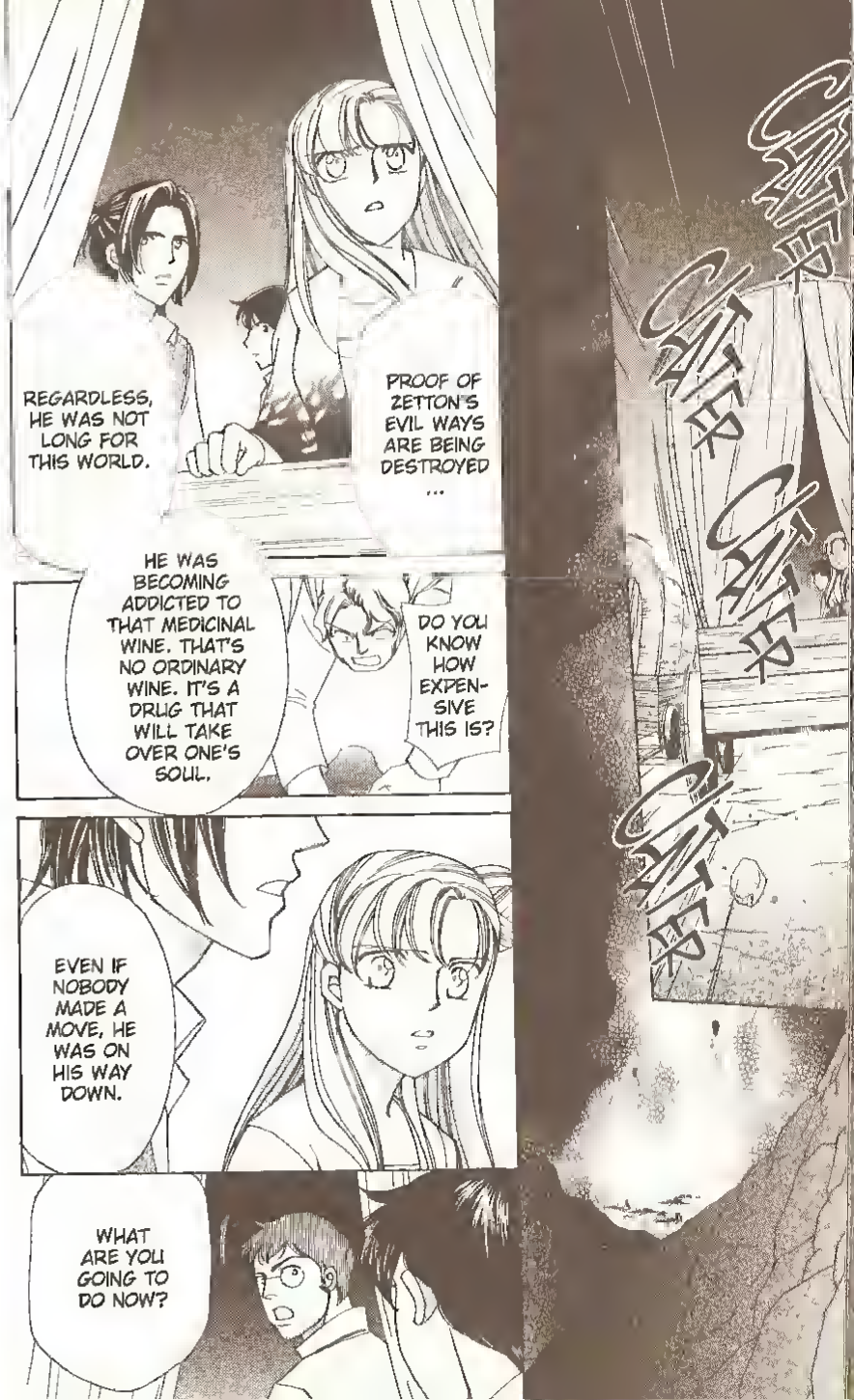
WAIT, I'M NOT WOUNDED.
THAT MEANS ...
THESE ARE FRAGMENTS OF OBSIDIAN ...
?
RISE
OOW
YOU'RE RIGHT! I WAS CARRYING THE OBSIDIAN IN MY CHEST POCKET AS AN AMULET.
IT WORKED!
TROUBLE-MAKERS!
WHAT IS THAT?
YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T TOUCH ME BACK THEN, BUT YOU KISSED ME!
WHAT WAS THAT FOR?!
LET'S LEAVE THEM HERE.
AND GO HOME
I AGREE

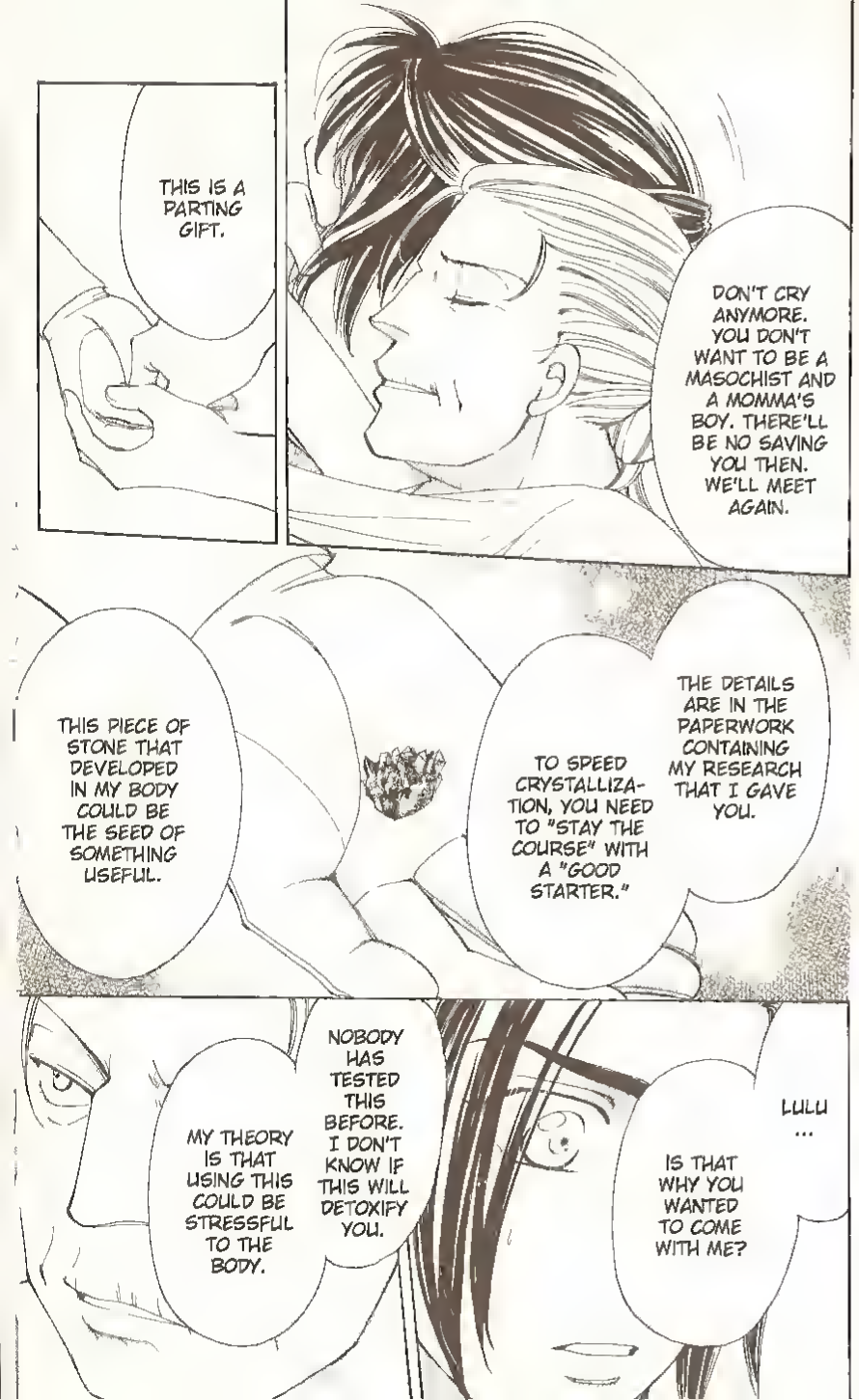
WHAT WAS THE GUNSHOT?
SODA...
YOU AND MY FRIENDS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN MY LIFE!
I DON'T CARE ABOUT DIAMONDS!
SODA!
I WANTED TO KISS A LOT MORE OFTEN...
MASTER... I'M SAD THAT MY LIFE IS OVER AFTER JUST ONE KISS.
SODA!
I CAN DIE NOW...
THANK YOU POPOLA.
CRUMBLE
CRUMBLE


I'M DOWN HERE!
THEY'RE HERE! FINALLY!
THE MEN FROM THE "SOUTHERN EMPIRE!"
IT'S ZETTON'S BUSINESS PARTNERS!
BOOM
WHOOSH
WHOOSH
THEY HAVE WEAPONS AND FLYING SHIPS?
THAT'S THEM?

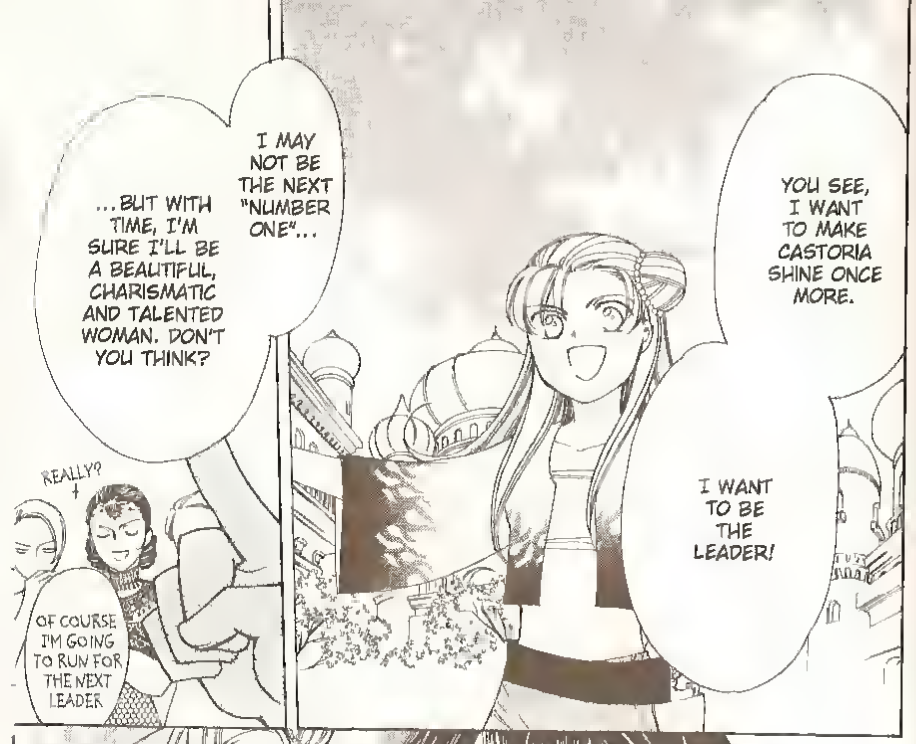
CRASH
CRASH
CRASH
WHAT'S GOING ON...!
IS EVERYONE ALL RIGHT?
THEY'RE PROBABLY PLANNING TO DESTROY THIS ENTIRE PLACE.
THEY SENSED SOMETHING UNUSUAL.
IT'S THE LODGE GUY!
GET IN THE CARRIAGE! WE HAVE TO GET OUT OF HERE QUICK!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON, BUT I'M GLAD I MADE IT ON TIME.
POPOLA, NOW!
BUT...
LET'S LEAVE!!
GATHER EVERYONE YOU CAN!
CRASH
CRASH
CRASH
PLEASE, STOP!
YOU PROMISED NOT TO INVADE CASTORIA!
YOU PROMISED ETERNAL LIFE!

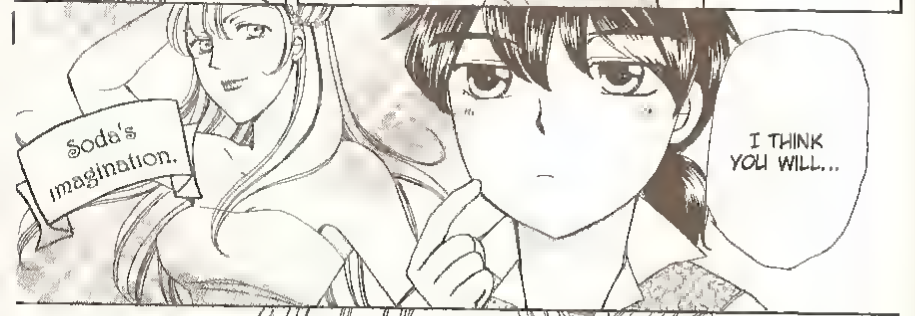
WHY? YOU FINALLY GAINED ENTRANCE.
IN THAT CASE, I'LL TAKE YOU OUT OF THE COUNTRY.
ARGENT'S FINISHED WITH HIS BUSINESS HERE. NOLA SHOULD LEAVE THIS COUNTRY WITH HER BABY.
TAKE US TO THE BORDER FOR NOW.
I HAD A BETTER TIME DREAMING, LOOKING UP AT THE WALLS OUTSIDE THE BORDER.
ONCE I ENTERED THE COUNTRY, IT WAS A DISAP-POINTMENT.
I DREAMED ABOUT CASTORIA FOR SO LONG.
I'VE HAD MY SHARE. I'M DONE.


REGARDLESS, HE WAS NOT LONG FOR THIS WORLD.
PROOF OF ZETTON'S EVIL WAYS ARE BEING DESTROYED ...
HE WAS BECOMING ADDICTED TO THAT MEDICINAL WINE. THAT'S NO ORDINARY WINE. IT'S A DRUG THAT WILL TAKE OVER ONE'S SOUL.
DO YOU KNOW HOW EXPEN-SIVE THIS IS?
EVEN IF NOBODY MADE A MOVE, HE WAS ON HIS WAY DOWN.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO NOW?
SHATTER SHATTER SHATTER

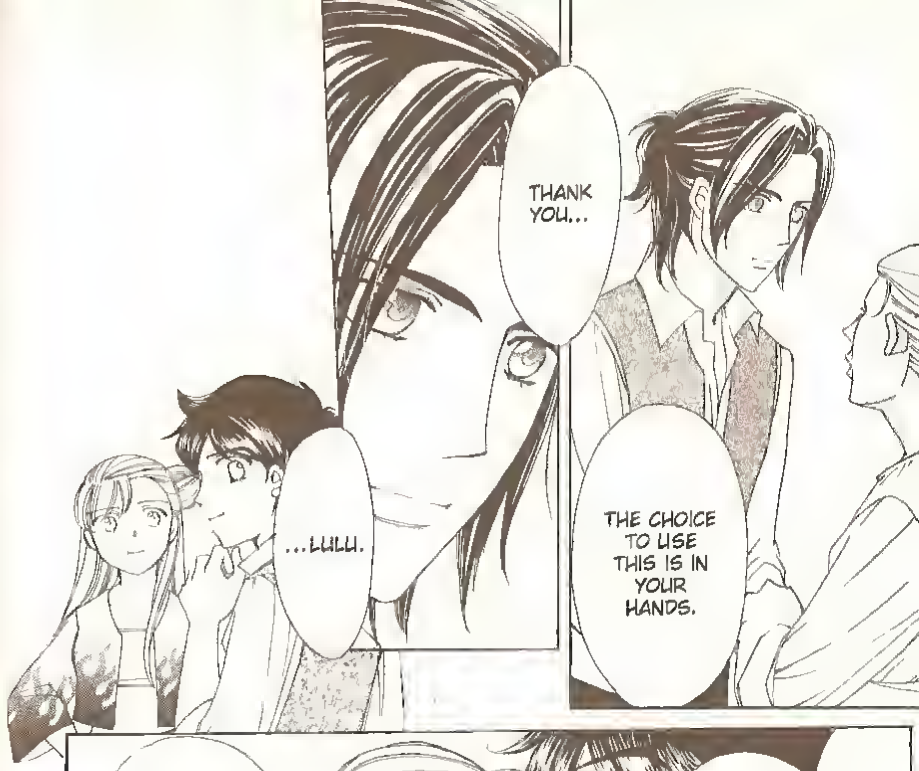

THIS IS A PARTING GIFT.
DON'T CRY ANYMORE. YOU DON'T WANT TO BE A MASOCHIST AND A MOMMA'S BOY. THERE'LL BE NO SAVING YOU THEN. WE'LL MEET AGAIN.
THIS PIECE OF STONE THAT DEVELOPED IN MY BODY COULD BE THE SEED OF SOMETHING USEFUL.
TO SPEED CRYSTALLIZATION, YOU NEED TO "STAY THE COURSE" WITH A "GOOD STARTER."
THE DETAILS ARE IN THE PAPERWORK CONTAINING MY RESEARCH THAT I GAVE YOU.
MY THEORY IS THAT USING THIS COULD BE STRESSFUL TO THE BODY.
NOBODY HAS TESTED THIS BEFORE. I DON'T KNOW IF THIS WILL DETOXIFY YOU.
IS THAT WHY YOU WANTED TO COME WITH ME?
LULU ...

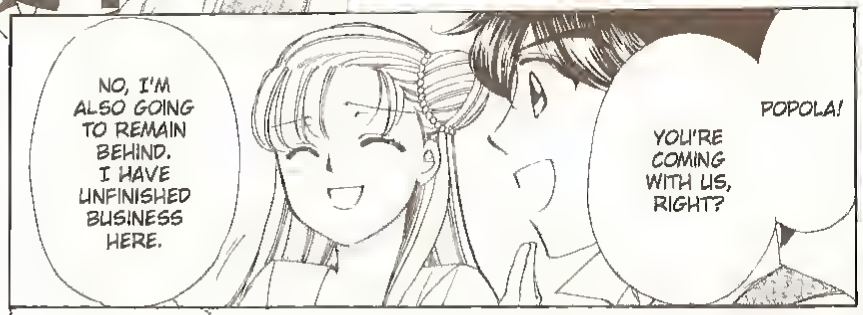
DON'T PUSH! ONE AT A TIME!
MISS. POPOLA ...
JADE'S HERE'S TO GREET US!
PEOPLE ARE IN A PANIC.
LOOKS LIKE ZETTON'S DEATH HAS REACHED THE BORDER ALREADY.
YOU SHOULD UNDERSTAND. I HAVE WORK HERE WAITING FOR ME.
WHY? LULU, COME WITH US! WE CAN GO SOMEWHERE AND WORK TOGETHER...
ARGENT, I'M GOING TO BID YOU FAREWELL NOW.


I MAY NOT BE THE NEXT "NUMBER ONE"...
...BUT WITH TIME, I'M SURE I'LL BE A BEAUTIFUL, CHARISMATIC AND TALENTED WOMAN. DON'T YOU THINK?
YOU SEE, I WANT TO MAKE CASTORIA SHINE ONCE MORE.
I WANT TO BE THE LEADER!
REALLY?
OF COURSE I'M GOING TO RUN FOR THE NEXT LEADER

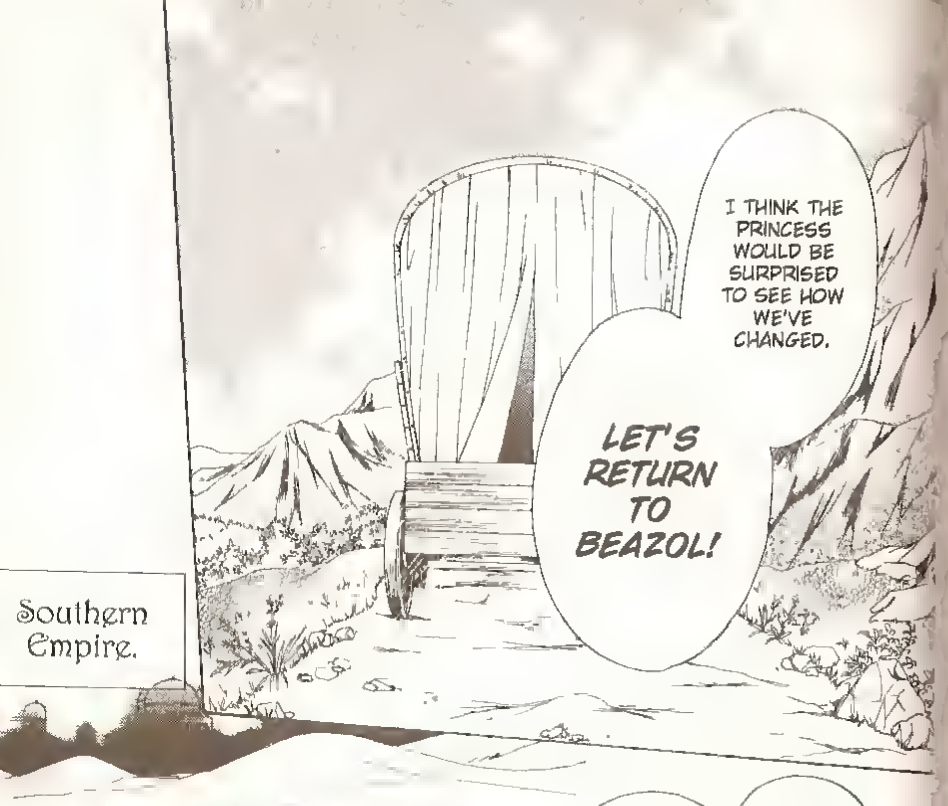

Soda's imagination.
I THINK YOU WILL...

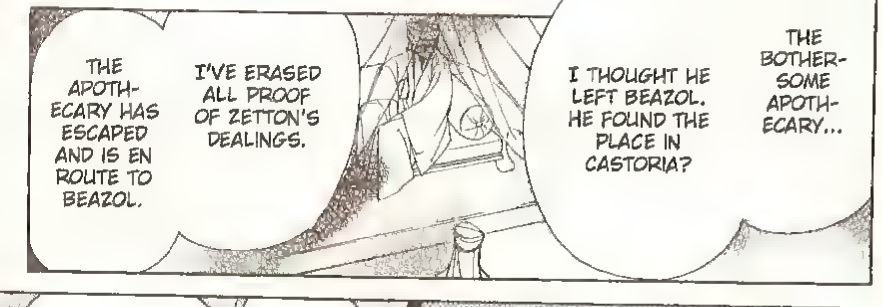
YOU'RE WELCOME TO OPEN YOUR OWN BUSINESS HERE!
IN A FEW YEARS, YOU'RE GOING TO BE AN AMAZING MAN!
THIS IS GOODBYE FOR NOW.


THANK YOU...
...LULU.
THE CHOICE TO USE THIS IS IN YOUR HANDS.

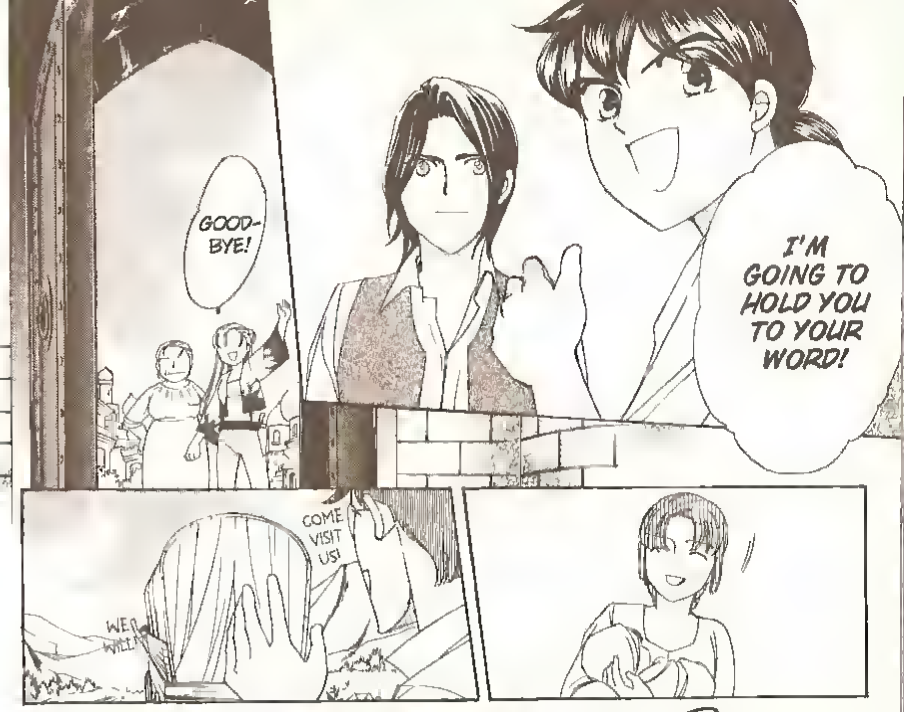

NO, I'M ALSO GOING TO REMAIN BEHIND. I HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS HERE.
POPOLA! YOU'RE COMING WITH US, RIGHT?

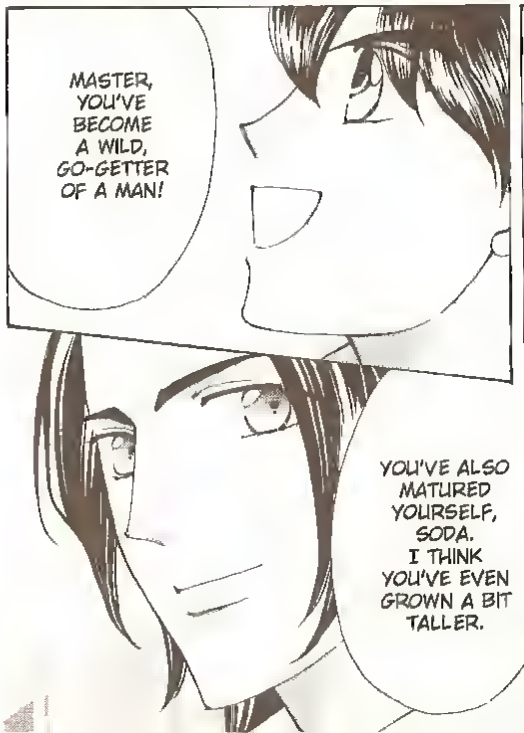
YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THAT HERE! YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO CASTORIA...!
I'LL WAIT FOR YOU AS LONG AS YOU NEED.
JADE, I WON'T BE JOINING YOU FOR A WHILE.
DON'T WORRY, I'M GOING TO BECOME A JEWELER AND POLISH MYSELF.

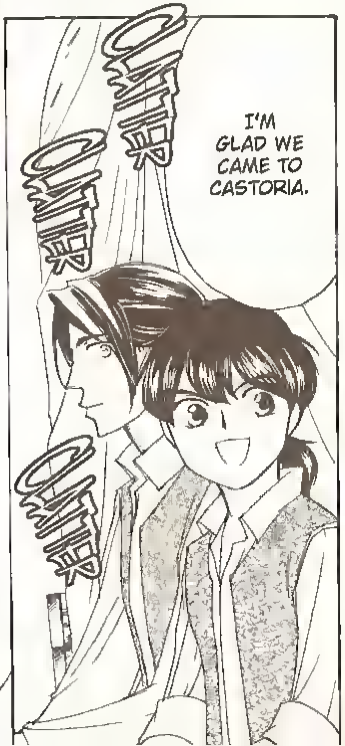

Southern Empire.
LET'S RETURN TO BEAZOL!
I THINK THE PRINCESS WOULD BE SURPRISED TO SEE HOW WE'VE CHANGED.


THE APOTH-ECARY HAS ESCAPED AND IS EN ROUTE TO BEAZOL.
I'VE ERASED ALL PROOF OF ZETTON'S DEALINGS.
I THOUGHT HE LEFT BEAZOL. HE FOUND THE PLACE IN CASTORIA?
THE BOTHER-SOME APOTH-ECARY...

NO, HE'S A BASILISK AFTER ALL. LET'S TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT.
SHOULD WE SEND AN ASSASSIN?
HE'S BECOMING AN OBSTACLE.


GOOD-BYE!
I'M GOING TO HOLD YOU TO YOUR WORD!
COME VISIT US!
WE WILL!


MASTER, YOU'VE BECOME A WILD, GO-GETTER OF A MAN!
YOU'VE ALSO MATURED YOURSELF, SODA. I THINK YOU'VE EVEN GROWN A BIT TALLER.


I'M GLAD WE CAME TO CASTORIA.
CLUTCH
CLUTCH

Postscript
and information

This is the final episode of the Castoria story. Sodd's my favorite, so I had a great time drawing him. I also wanted to create a story around Prince Daniel, and I'm thrilled I was able to do it. Daniel was supposed to be cool in a creepy way, but fans seem to think he's cute in a creepy way. In the next volume... I mean chapter... Argent will be reunited with the Princess! I hope my fans continue to support this series!!

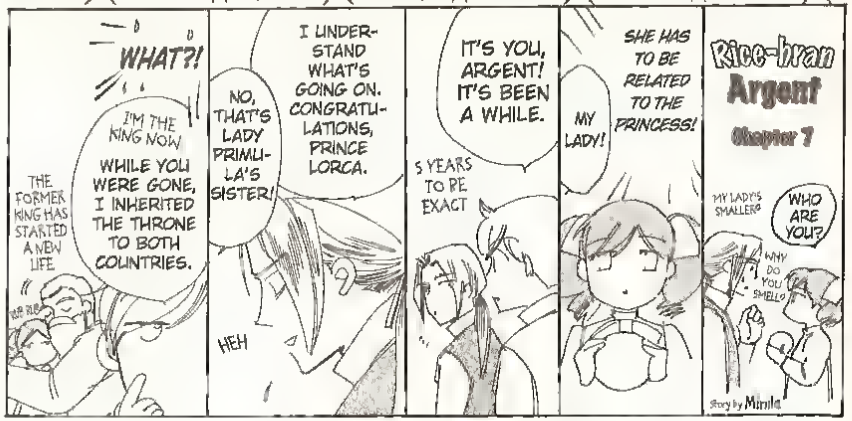
(Feb. 2008)

Claviceps

Also known as Ergot, Claviceps is a black fungus that grows on grains that have been stressed and weakened. People called it argot (French), meaning Devil's horns, and it was greatly feared. It caused hallucinations, food poisoning and seizures throughout Europe, due to its high concentrations of the alkaloid ergotamine. Historically, ergot was used to induce abortions and halt postnatal bleeding. However, it is no longer used for those purposes. Ergot alkaloids are now used to treat migraine headaches. However, new drugs are also beginning to replace ergot alkaloids as a treatment for migraines.

Obsidian

Obsidian is a naturally occurring, black colored glass formed from lava. When fractured, the edges are incredibly sharp. As a result, it was utilized for a long time for knives and arrowheads, going back to the stone ages. The edge of obsidian blades are much sharper than even high quality surgical steel scalpels. As a result, it is used in cardiac, optometrical and nerve surgery. Obsidian is also used as a gemstone.


WHAT?!
I'M THE KING NOW
WHILE YOU WERE GONE, I INHERITED THE THRONE TO BOTH COUNTRIES.
THE FORMER KING HAS STARTED A NEW LIFE
I UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON. CONGRATULATIONS, PRINCE LORCA.
NO, THAT'S LADY PRIMULA'S SISTER!
HEH
IT'S YOU, ARGENT! IT'S BEEN A WHILE.
5 YEARS TO BE EXACT
MY LADY!
SHE HAS TO BE RELATED TO THE PRINCESS!
Rice-bran Argent
Chapter 7
MY LADY'S SMALLER
WHO ARE YOU?
WHY DO YOU SMELL?
Story by Minila

Where's Lady Primula?! To be continued...

Apothecarius Argentum c/o CMX
888 Prospect Street, Suite 240,
La Jolla CA 92037

USE POISON TO FIGHT POISON. LET'S SEND CORDA.
YOU'LL GUIDE US INSIDE BEAZOL LIKE BEFORE, RIGHT?
YES, LEAVE BEAZOL UP TO ME.
AFTER ALL, I'M TRILDAN, THE SON OF PRINCE TIGASON, THE LATE BROTHER OF THE KING.
I'LL DO ANYTHING TO DESTROY THE KING THAT SENT MY ENTIRE FAMILY TO HELL.